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ADORATION OF THE KINGS

LESSON COMMENTARY
FOR
SUNDAY SCHOOLS

1930

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IMPROVED UNIFORM LESSONS FOR 1930

FIRST QUARTER

The Gospel of the Kingdom:

Studies in Matthew

- Lesson 1.** Jan. 5. CHILDHOOD OF JESUS. Matthew 1:1-2; 23. Print 2:10-23.
- 2.** Jan. 12. BAPTISM AND TEMPTATION OF JESUS. Matthew 3:1-4:11. Print 3:13-4:11.
- 3.** Jan. 19. JESUS BEGINS HIS MINISTRY. Matthew 4:12-25. Print verses 17-25.
- 4.** Jan. 26. STANDARDS OF THE KINGDOM. Matthew 5:1-48. Print verses 3-9, 17-20, 43-48.
- 5.** Feb. 2. PUTTING GOD'S KINGDOM FIRST. Matthew 6:1-34. Print verses 5-13, 19-21, 31-33.
- 6.** Feb. 9. WARNINGS AND PROMISES. (Temperance Lesson.) Matthew 7:1-29. Print verses 12, 15-27.
- 7.** Feb. 16. JESUS HEALING AND HELPING. Matthew 8:1-9:34. Print 9:1-13.
- 8.** Feb. 23. THE TWELVE SENT FORTH. Matthew 9:35-11:1. Print 9:35-10:8; 10:40-42.
- 9.** Mar. 2. JESUS TEACHING ABOUT HIMSELF. Matthew 11:2-12:50. Print 11:2-6, 25-30.
- 10.** Mar. 9. THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER. Matthew 13:1-23. Print verses 1-9, 18-23.
- 11.** Mar. 16. PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM. Matthew 13:24-52. Print verses 31-33, 44-52.
- 12.** Mar. 23. JESUS TEACHING AND HEALING. Matthew 13:53-16:12. Print 15:21-31.
- 13.** Mar. 30. REVIEW. Devotional Reading: John 10:7-16.

SECOND QUARTER

The Gospel of the Kingdom:

Studies in Matthew

- Lesson 1.** April 6. THE LAW OF THE CROSS. Matthew 16:13-17:27. Print 16:13-26.
- 2.** April 13. THE CHILD AND THE KINGDOM. Matthew 18:1-14; 19:13-15. Print 18:1-6, 12-14; 19:13-15.
- 3.** April 20. EASTER LESSON. John 20:1-16.
- 4.** April 27. GIVING UP ALL FOR THE KINGDOM. Matthew 19:1-29. Print verses 16-26.
- 5.** May 4. PROMOTION IN THE KINGDOM. Matthew 19:30-20:28. Print 20:17-28.
- 6.** May 11. JESUS ACCLAIMED AS KING. Matthew 20:29-21:46. Print 21:1-11.
- 7.** May 18. JESUS TEACHING IN THE TEMPLE. Matthew 22:1-23:39. Print 22:15-22, 34-40.
- 8.** May 25. JESUS DESCRIBES THE FUTURE OF THE KINGDOM. Matthew 24:1-25:13. Print 25:1-13.
- 9.** June 1. CONTRAST BETWEEN FAITHFULNESS AND SLÖTHFULNESS. Matthew 25:14-46. Print verses 14-30.
- 10.** June 8. JESUS IN THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS. Matthew 26:1-75. Print verses 31-46.
- 11.** June 15. JESUS ON THE CROSS. Matthew 27:1-66. Print verses 33-50.
- 12.** June 22. THE RISEN LORD AND THE GREAT COMMISSION. Matthew 28:1-20. Print verses 1-10, 16-20.
- 13.** June 29. REVIEW. Devotional Reading: Matthew 5:1-16.

THIRD QUARTER

Representative Men and Women of the Old Testament

- Lesson 1.** July 6. ABRAHAM: A PIONEER OF FAITH. Genesis 12:1-5; 13:1-12; 17:1-8; 18:22-33; Hebrews 11:8-10. Print Genesis 12:1-3; 13:7-12; Hebrews 11:8-10.
- 2.** July 13. JACOB: A SELFISH MAN

TRANSFORMED. Genesis 25:19-34; chapters 27-33; 46:28-47:12. Print Genesis 25:29-34; 28:18-22; 29:18-20; 33:1-4, 18.

3. July 20. MOSES: A COURAGEOUS LEADER. Exodus 1:8-14; 2:1-22; 3:1-14; 11:1-10; 32:30-35; Deuteronomy 34:1-8; Hebrews 11:23-29. Print Exodus 3:1-12.

4. July 27. DEBORAH: A LEADER IN A NATIONAL EMERGENCY. (May Be Used With Temperance Applications.) Judges 4:1-15. Print verses 1-10.

5. Aug. 3. NAOMI AND RUTH: A STUDY IN RACIAL RELATIONSHIPS. The Book of Ruth. Print Ruth 1:6-10, 14-22.

6. Aug. 10. HANNAH: A GODLY MOTHER. I Samuel 1:1-28; 2:1-11, 18, 19; 3:1-18. Print I Samuel 1:9-18, 24-28; 2:19.

7. Aug. 17. SAUL: A MAN OF GREAT POSSIBILITIES WHO FAILED. I Samuel chapters 8-11; 13; 15; 16:14-23; 19:9-12; 28; 31. Print I Samuel 9:15-17, 25-27; 10:1; 19:9-11; 31:1-4.

8. Aug. 24. JONATHAN AND DAVID: A NOBLE FRIENDSHIP. I Samuel 18:1-4; 19:1-7; chap. 20; II Samuel 1:17-27. Print I Samuel 18:1-4; 20:14-17, 32-34, 41-42; II Samuel 1:25-27.

9. Aug. 31. AMOS: A HERDSMAN CALLED OF GOD TO BE A PROPHET. The Book of Amos. Print 1:1; 7:10-15; 2:11, 12; 3:7, 8.

10. Sept. 7. JOSIAH: A ROYAL REFORMER. (May Be Used With Temperance Applications.) II Kings 22; 23:1-3, 21-25; II Chronicles 34 and 35. Print II Kings 22:1, 2, 8; 23:1-3, 21-25.

11. Sept. 14. JEREMIAH: THE PROPHET OF INDIVIDUAL RELIGION. Jeremiah 1:1-10; 14:7-22; 31:27-34. Print 1:4-10; 31:27-34.

12. Sept. 21. JONAH: THE NARROW NATIONALIST REBUKED. Read the Book of Jonah. Print Jonah 3:1-5, 10; 4:1-11.

13. Sept. 28. REVIEW: THE GREATNESS OF THE GOD-FEARING. Devotional Reading: Psalm 8.

FOURTH QUARTER

Representative Men and Women of the New Testament

Lesson 1. Oct. 5. ZACHARIAS AND ELISABETH: LIFE IN A PIOUS JEWISH HOME. Luke 1:5-80. Print verses 5, 6, 57-66, 76-80.

2. Oct. 12. MARY, THE MOTHER OF JESUS: AN EXAMPLE OF MOTHERHOOD. Luke 2:15-19; John 2:1-5; 19:25-27.

3. Oct. 19. SIMEON AND ANNA: THE INSIGHT OF THE PURE IN HEART. Luke 2:25-39.

4. Oct. 26. WORLD'S TEMPERANCE SUNDAY: SPIRITUAL WEAPONS IN A WORLD WAR. Galatians 5:13-26.

5. Nov. 2. SIMON PETER: FROM WEAKNESS TO STRENGTH. Mark 8:27-29; Luke 22:31-34; John 18:25-27; 21:15-17.

6. Nov. 9. THOMAS: THE HONEST DOUBTER. John 11:14-16; 14:5-7; 20:24-29; 21:1, 2.

7. Nov. 16. THE BELIEVING CENTURION: A GENTILE WHOSE FAITH JESUS COMMENDED. Matthew 8:5-13.

8. Nov. 23. THE RICH YOUNG RULER: REFUSING A LIFE OF SACRIFICIAL SERVICE. Mark 10:17-27.

9. Nov. 30. ZACCHAEUS THE PUBLICAN: A BUSINESS MAN CONVERTED. Luke 19:1-10.

10. Dec. 7. STEPHEN: AN EARLY INTERPRETER OF CHRISTIANITY. Acts 6:1-7; 60. Print Acts 6:7-10; 7:54-60.

11. Dec. 14. SAUL OF TARSUS: HOW A PHARISEE BECAME A CHRISTIAN. Acts 22:3-15.

12. Dec. 21. CHRISTMAS LESSON. Luke 2:1-20. Print verses 8-20.

13. Dec. 28. REVIEW: THE PATTERN OF CHRISTIAN LIVING. Devotional Reading: Matthew 5:3-16.

FIRST QUARTER

The Gospel of the Kingdom—Studies in Matthew

First
Quarter

CHILDHOOD OF JESUS

Lesson I
January 5

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 1:1—2:23. (Print 2:10-23.)
(American Standard Revision Text)

10. And when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

11. And they came into the house and saw the young child with Mary his mother; and they fell down and worshipped him; and opening their treasures they offered unto him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

12. And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

13. Now when they were departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I tell thee: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.

14. And he arose and took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt:

15. and was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt did I call my son.

16. Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the Wise-men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the male children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the borders

thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had exactly learned of the Wise-men.

17. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet, saying,

18. A voice was heard in Ramah,
Weeping and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children;
And she would not be comforted,
because they are not.

19. But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying,

20. Arise and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead that sought the young child's life.

21. And he arose and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel.

22. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judæa in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither; and being warned of God in a dream, he withdrew into the parts of Galilee,

23. and came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophets, that he should be called a Nazarene.

GOLDEN TEXT: Thou shalt call his name JESUS; for it is he that shall save his people from their sins.—Matthew 1:21.

LESSON GOAL: To show that the origin of Jesus, the Messiah, was indeed both human and Divine.

LESSON PLAN

I. THE BIRTH LIST OF JESUS (Matt. 1:1-17).

II. THE BIRTH OF JESUS (18-25).

III. THE BABYHOOD OF JESUS.

1. The Coming of the Magi. (2:1-12.)

2. The Flight into Egypt. (13-15.)

3. The Slaughter of the Innocents. (16-18.)

4. The Return to Nazareth. (19-23.)

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

Verse 10: *Saw the star*.—The guiding star has been variously explained as a conjunction of planets, a comet, or a special star for the occasion. The Magi were students of the stars. They cherished a Messianic hope. The scattered Jews doubtless told of the expected Messiah. The wise men interpreted the strange star as “portending the birth of a mighty king.” The star was novel in that it “went before them” and “stood over the place.”

Verse 11: *Offered unto him gifts*. — The eastern custom is to approach monarchs with gifts, the costliest and most representative. The Magi came to Jesus, regarding Him as a royal child. They knew nothing of His divinity. Gold was appropriate for royalty; frankincense was a fragrant gum used in making holy anointing oils; myrrh was similarly used.

Verse 19: *Appeareth . . . in a dream*.—Dreams, or visions, were used by God for the purposes of His kingdom. Skill in interpreting dreams was highly developed in the Orient. The angel spoke to Joseph in a dream, but the message was direct, needing no interpretation.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

Bethlehem is six miles southwest of Jerusalem. It is on an elevation a little east of the road from Jerusalem to Hebron. It dates to ancient times, being formerly called Ephrath, or Ephratah. It has never had ranking as an important place, except for the persons and events linked with it in biblical history. The field of Boaz is near-by; the place where the shepherds announced Jesus' advent is close at hand; here lived Naomi, Ruth and David. Its fame climaxes as the birthplace of Jesus.

Galilee is the northern section of Palestine; it was divided into Upper Galilee and Lower Galilee. It is a small country, about sixty miles long by twenty-five miles wide, but it gave the world its greatest records, those of Jesus Christ. Nazareth is in a bowl-shaped valley, surrounded by the hills bordering Esdraelon. It is rather secluded, just off the main highway running north and south. The view from the surrounding hills is extensive. Here Jesus spent His boyhood. The Fountain of the Virgin is here. Jesus must have gone to this well for water; it is the only fountain in the vicinity.

Herod the Great, by intrigue, had been given the title of “King of the Jews” by Rome. He conquered Palestine in 37 B. C. and ruled as its undisputed master until his death in 4 B. C. “This Herod was a great builder, and the result was to give Palestine in his day a magnificence it never at any other time possessed.” He was succeeded by two sons, Archelaus, a tactless tyrant, ruling over Judæa, and Philip, a good ruler, reigning over Galilee. Joseph did well to return to Galilee rather than Judæa, after the sojourn in Egypt.

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

The Gospel of the Kingdom must tell about the King. In addressing the Jews Matthew aimed to show Jesus as the Messiah, fulfilling the promise to Abraham that “in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed” and possessing all the “wealth of Messianic glory associated with the seed of David.”

THE BIRTH LIST OF JESUS

The genealogy of Jesus is traced from Abraham to Joseph the husband of Mary, indicating His belonging to the Jews and being in the

royal line. The promised King was to sit on David's throne. Three groups of fourteen generations, covering the three periods of Hebrew history, are indicated. There is not strict adherence to records, as all the names are not given. The fondness for using "divine numbers," three and seven, influenced Matthew, a Jew writing for Jews. The fourteen generations is a "symbolic not an arithmetic number." Four women are in the list, two being Gentiles and three having unsavory records. The purpose in naming these apparently is to offset any disparagement of Jesus because of His lowly birth, since David was chosen of God though of tainted ancestry, and to identify Jesus with the lowly and sinful, whether Jews or Gentiles. In verse 16 there is an unexpected change; it does not say "and Joseph begat Jesus." Does this indicate that Joseph's relation to Jesus was different from that of others to their begotten sons? Is this "a singularly impressive testimony to the miracle of our Lord's birth?"

THE BIRTH OF JESUS

Matthew tells nothing of the birth of Jesus, except to mention the fact. He deals with the strange circumstance in which Joseph found himself. Mary was his betrothed. Being found with child, the law required that Joseph publicly divorce her, betrothal being counted as binding as marriage. As one who kept the letter of the law strictly, Joseph would be expected to "put her to an open shame." But Joseph decided to enforce the law as kindly and considerately as possible. Of course he would not marry Mary, but he would divorce her privately, avoiding the severe legal penalties.

Joseph's decision was not carried out, because of the dream he had in which an angel gave him instructions. He did not resent the angel's directions. He recognized the honor of being called a son of David. He was filled with the Messianic hope. The declaration of the angel that Mary was to become the mother of a son, to whom Joseph was to have the privilege of giving the name Jesus, removed all hesitancy to take Mary as his wife. The name Jesus was to take on a new significance when given to Mary's son.

The angel assured Joseph that the whole strange occurrence was in fulfillment of the word of the Lord through the prophet. To Joseph, this was a final plea for obedience to the angel's directions. When he arose from sleep, he assumed the care of Mary, until she brought forth a son. This son Joseph called JESUS. The naming of Jesus took place on the eighth day, the day of the circumcision. (Luke 1: 59).

THE BABYHOOD OF JESUS

Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Luke tells how His parents came to be there. It is from Luke we learn that they had lived in Nazareth prior to the return from Egypt. Matthew has no account of the manger, the shepherds, the circumcision, or the presentation in the temple. Herod the Great was ruling. His first news of the birth of Jesus was from *the coming of the Magi*, with their question, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?"

These Magi were from the East. They were students of the stars. The appearance of a stranger among the stars was interpreted by them as a sign of a king's birth; they set out to find him and pay homage to him. But, why did they go to Jerusalem? "It is recorded, among others, by the Latin historians Tacitus and Suetonius, that in those days even the heathen were anticipating the dawn of a better era and, influenced by rumors of Israel's Messianic hope, were looking to the Holy Land for its inauguration." Search was made to give correct answer to the Magi. Bethlehem was the place for the birth. The Magi found the child, several weeks old by that time, gave Him gifts, paid Him homage, and returned to the East, by a way that avoided Jerusalem. Thus, under God's guidance they disobeyed Herod's orders that they should report to him where the young child was.

The flight into Egypt spared the life of Jesus from the decree of Herod that all male children under two years old in and near Bethlehem should be killed. Joseph was warned and directed by God. Egypt was a natural refuge, easy of access by the main caravan route; under Roman rule, the thousands of Jewish settlers in Egypt were protected and prosperous. The fugitives would be among friends in Egypt. Their sojourn in Egypt was until the death of Herod. Matthew saw in their return a fulfillment of the prophecy, "Out of Egypt have I called my son."

Herod was not to be undone by the failure of the Magi to report the whereabouts of the child. He decreed *the slaughter of the innocents*, as it has come to be called. Herod's cruelty knew no limits. He ordered his emissaries to search out all male children and kill them. Bethlehem was a small village, so the victims would be few; "yet even so it was a fiendish atrocity, and it sent a shudder through the land." Another prophecy is cited (Jer. 31: 15) in which "Rachel, mother of Joseph and Benjamin, is pictured as lamenting the fate of her descendants, as from her grave she hears the train of the captives passing northward from the ruined city."

The return to Nazareth was because of direction from God. Herod was dead and it seemed safe to go home. But Herod's son Archelaus was as cruel as his father. He started his reign with the murder of three thousand citizens to show he was a genuine son of Herod. Nazareth, their early home, was outside Archelaus' jurisdiction. God sent the Holy Family to Nazareth, though it had an evil reputation and living there would prejudice the Jews against our Lord's Messianic claims. Matthew links their return to Nazareth with a prophecy that "he should be called a Nazarene." This must not be confused with His being a "nazirite."

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

THEY SAW A YOUNG CHILD

So this was the reward for their long, arduous journey! They came to see a royal son; they saw a young child, human in every respect, similar in all appearances to other children, surrounded by no pomp,

provided with no official guards or servants. No wonder Herod and the authorities in Jerusalem knew not that He had been born. There was nothing about His advent to startle a nation, or arouse suspicion that He was "born King of the Jews." The Magi came, they saw, and they went away, remembering that they had seen a young child.

But there was something different about that child, which the onlooker was sure to miss. He was divine as well as human; God was in Him, but the casual observer did not detect the fact. We are glad that we know He was so human, so like us, just a young child. We marvel that one so human could be our Saviour.

I know not how that Bethlehem's Babe
Could in the God-head be;
I only know the Manger Child
Has brought God's life to me.—*Quotable Poems.*

THEY WORSHIPED JESUS

The Magi came prepared to do homage to the new King of the Jews. They saw Him "with Mary his mother." They did not worship her; their worship was for Him. It was an expression of Oriental respect and reverence for a monarch; this was customary and their gifts were significant. Their attitude of humility was that of obedient subjects. Their worship was largely a formal act as of one potentate before another, and yet they must have been God-guided on this quest, and it is not presuming too much to conclude that they were God-illuminated to behold in the child more than the human.

We must admire Jesus the man; we cannot help worshipping Jesus the God. We search for Him, because we need Him. We find Him because God leads us. But, do we worship Him? Do we come prepared to worship Him? Have we the graciousness to bow before Him? Have we any gifts ready for Him?

THE FATHER'S PROTECTION

God protected His Son. We need no better proof that Jesus is God than this record of miraculous protection. Herod lied to the Magi; he did not want to worship the new King. His purpose was to destroy Him. The Father sent His Son into Egypt in the tender care of Mary and under the sturdy guardianship of Joseph. The sojourn in Egypt was to safeguard Him; the minute directions about the return, not to Jerusalem but to Nazareth, were evidences of the Father's care.

We wonder how much Jesus the Man was strengthened in His willingness to seek His Father's help in prayer, because He knew about the Father's protection in childhood. Surely He was told this marvelous story by His mother. We wonder how many mothers today are teaching their children about the heavenly Father's care for them. We wonder how many work-driven men are going for help today to the God of their childhood, the God their mothers helped them to know.

BELIEVING IN GOD'S SON

May we not feel assured that Mary and Joseph believed that the child entrusted to them was God's Son? Could they escape this belief after all the strange things that had been told them by God's messenger? Did not the humble shepherds' story, and the Magi's visit, make them sure that Jesus was more than human? They were not fanatics, but earnest believers in God.

What greater and better reasons are ours to believe in God's Son! All the gospels record about Him, all the early Church believed concerning Him, all the countless millions since have gained from Him, all He is doing in the world today, all He is to us, makes complete faith in Jesus reasonable.

THE FIRST PLOT AGAINST JESUS

Herod did it in his ignorance and jealousy. Had he understood Jesus' purpose for the Jews he would not have been jealous. Had he been less sinful, he would have been less cowardly. He plotted the death of the child Jesus. His cruel heart considered neither the injustice of his decree nor the sufferings it would bring. He ordered male children under two years old killed. No matter how many they were, or how few, Herod did not care just so Jesus might be slain.

There has been a long series of plots against Jesus since. One great plot climaxed in His crucifixion, but it did not destroy Him. Men as cruel as Herod, as unjust as Pilate, as envious as the Jews, still plot against Him. They make light of His cross, refusing to accept His redemption. They ignore His love, spurning His gracious mercy. They crucify Him anew, ridiculing His mission of salvation. Herod's plot did not touch Jesus. The plots of today are not discounting His power, or destroying His kingdom.

CARING FOR JESUS

No mortals ever had higher honor or more inspiring privilege than Mary and Joseph in working together with God in caring for Jesus. Jesus was dependent on them and God depended on them. The dangers they faced, the deprivations they endured, the sacrifices they made were their delight, for they were caring for Jesus.

Jesus must be cared for now. He is as dependent on human care today as when He was a child. His name must be safeguarded against defilement; His honor must be supported against slander; His cause must be defended against stealthy unbelief. His Gospel must be preached, His love must be manifested, His world must learn to trust Him. He depends on them who know Him and love Him to care for everything that is His.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

Read the lesson text. Study the life of John the Baptist, noting its relation to Jesus. Why did Jesus come to John for baptism? Why was Jesus tempted? Are there evidences in His baptism and temptation of His being God? How did baptism and temptation prepare Him for His ministry?

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 3:1—4:11. (Print 3:13—4:11.)
(American Standard Revision Text)

3:13. Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to the Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him.

14. But John would have hindered him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?

15. But Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffereth him.

16. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway from the water: and lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon him;

17. and lo, a voice out of the heavens, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

4:1 Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.

2. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he afterward hungered.

3. And the tempter came and said unto him, If thou art the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.

4. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread

alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

5. Then the devil taketh him into the holy city; and he set him on the pinnacle of the temple,

6. and saith unto him, If thou art the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee:

and,
On their hands they shall bear thee up, Lest haply thou dash thy foot against a stone.

7. Jesus said unto him, Again it is written, Thou shalt not make trial of the Lord thy God.

8. Again, the devil taketh him unto an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them;

9. and he said unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.

10. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

11. Then the devil leaveth him; and behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

GOLDEN TEXT: This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.—
Matthew 3:17.

LESSON GOAL: To show how Jesus was prepared for His ministry.

LESSON PLAN

I. THE HERALD OF JESUS (3:1-12).

1. John's Preaching.
2. John's Baptizing.

II. THE BAPTISM OF JESUS (13-17).

1. The Argument.
2. The Act.
3. The Approval.

III. THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS (4:1-11).

1. The Tempter.
2. The Temptations.
3. The Triumph.

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

3:13: *To be baptized.*—John did not originate baptism. The use of washings as symbols of purification was common among the Jews and

others. But John's baptism was "from heaven" (Matt. 21: 25); he had his commission from God. He claimed for baptism only an act indicative of repentance looking forward to remission of sins. It was to this baptism Jesus deliberately came, though He was sinless.

Verse 16: *As a dove*.—The dove was used as a symbol of the divine presence, perhaps because of its meek and harmless manner. It is "a fit emblem of the harmless and peaceful character of Jesus." The dove's presence was "a visible pledge of spiritual enduement." Both Jesus and John thus interpreted the dove's coming upon Him.

4: 2: *When he had fasted*.—Fasting was a voluntary abstinence from food for religious reasons. It was not required in the Mosaic law. Christ did not enjoin it. Jesus' forty days and nights of fasting, like the fastings of Moses and Elijah, did not end disastrously because He was miraculously sustained.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

The Baptist probably began his work near Jericho, at a point in the river where the caravans would cross: from these he would draw his earliest audiences, and through them news of his appearance and work would reach Jerusalem and the surrounding country.—*P. A. Mickleth.*

Jesus, in Nazareth, heard of John's work and made the rather difficult journey to the spot where John was baptizing. This would be particularly true if the place of Jesus' baptism be put at Bethabara on the lower Jordan, near Jericho. The exact spot has not been determined. All we know is that Jesus went to John for baptism and that He was baptized in the Jordan.

Following the baptism, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. Just where the temptation took place is not known. "Tradition points to a high mountain a little west of Jericho, overlooking the plain of the Jordan and beyond, as the exceeding high mountain from which the tempter showed the Lord all the kingdoms of the world. . . . The place of the temptation was probably not very far distant from the place of the baptism."

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

Two significant steps in the preparation of Jesus for His ministry were, first, His baptism in which He received the Father's sanction and the visible anointing with the Holy Spirit and, second, the testing of His faith and strength to disprove Satan's power and to prove His fitness for His ministry. A study of these steps is introduced by an account of the ministry of John the Baptist.

THE HERALD OF JESUS

Matthew 3: 1-12. Matthew introduces John as the forerunner of Jesus. He presents him as a man with a message and ties him back to the prophecy in Isaiah 40: 3. (Luke gives the account of his birth and locates his ministry in the chronology of secular history.) He had lived a separated life, a man of the hills and he started his work in the wilderness of Judæa. His clothing was the commonest sort and his food such as could be gathered. (Locusts are still used for food and the honey of wild bees is still gathered from rocks and trees.)

John's preaching was directed to the multitudes that were strangely drawn to him from Jerusalem, Judæa and the whole Jordan valley. His

text was sin and his sermon was a call to repentance, in preparation for entrance into the approaching kingdom. This sensational preacher, his oddity of dress and his surprising messages, started crowds toward him. He entered neither city nor towns; he waited for the people and the people came. Among those coming were Pharisees and Sadducees, parties in bitter enmity on both religious and political matters. John believed them insincere and demanded that they repent and prove their repentance by a changed way of life. They could not hide behind the old shield that they were descendants of Abraham. God's exacting plan was that fruitless trees should be hewn down; the process of cutting was about to begin.

John used figures of speech drawn from well-known things, the reptiles flying from the heat of a bush fire, the fruit-bearing trees, the destruction of barren trees, the stones lying near them, the servant and his master's shoes, the threshing-floor and the winnowing fan.

John's baptizing was with the water of the Jordan. It followed the acknowledgment of repentance and was a token of expected forgiveness. It was not a sacramental baptism; this was to be instituted by Christ. "It did not impart grace itself, but it directed men to Him by whom grace and truth come."

John's "preaching and baptism" was not a finality; it was a means of heralding the mightier One to come, a call to be ready for His coming. John declared himself less than the coming One and his baptism inferior to what He would employ.

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

Verses 13-17. Jesus in Nazareth, thirty years old, heard of the preaching and baptizing of John. He was impelled to go to John for the one purpose of being baptized by him. When Jesus presented himself to John, *the argument* was begun by John which has caused much discussion through the centuries. Why should Jesus, the sinless, seek John's baptism of repentance? How could He confess, or anticipate forgiveness? Something about Jesus impressed John with His superiority. He emphatically declared that he needed baptism by Jesus and protested strenuously against baptizing Jesus. Jesus offered no explanation except to request (or was it command?) that He be baptized since they ought to fulfill all righteousness. The "now" indicates that later on John would understand Jesus' motive. Jesus endorsed the divine authority of John's ministry by coming for baptism. He identified himself with the people who were coming. He began to be made sin for us.

The act of baptism was performed for Jesus by John, as it had been done for many. The difference was in what followed the baptismal act. There is no intimation that John treated Jesus any differently from his treatment of others, as he baptized Him. Anyone seeing Jesus baptized would not have guessed that He was other than a common man of Galilee and what happened later was seen and heard and interpreted only by John and Jesus.

After the baptism was over and they had come from the water,

while Jesus was in prayer, a fitting sequence of baptism, two things happened that evidenced *the approval* of the Father and of the Holy Spirit. When the heavens opened, Jesus saw the Holy Spirit descending as a dove and alighting upon Him. John also saw this and by it knew for the first time that "He is the Son of God" (John 1: 32-34). The Holy Spirit approved of Jesus and anointed Him for His ministry. Then the Father's voice was heard in completest acknowledgment and approval of Jesus, His Son, now incarnate and anointed for His ministry.

THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS

Matthew 4: 1-11. From the exalting and inspiring experience of His baptism, which climaxed in the divine declaration of His Sonship and His fitness for His ministry, Jesus was led, as a willing follower, into tests of His loyalty to that Sonship. Satan was brought into testing; he was to use all his wily temptations to disprove the faithfulness of Jesus to His Sonship. Each of the temptations in turn seems to expose the unsoundness of the claims of Sadducees who would sacrifice principle for material gain, of the Pharisees who presumed on God's special favors for them and on the Herodians who would give up every thing for the gain of political power. The apparent purpose of the temptations was to disprove the claims and power of Satan and to establish the supremacy of Jesus, as the Son of God. Besides Jesus in becoming man must "submit to the human experience of temptation." So in the wilderness for forty days Jesus was tempted by Satan.

The tempter is the arch enemy of God and of every good in man. He is given to false accusations of God and of man. He is always misrepresenting God to man, just as he did in Eden. In the temptations of Jesus he was "misrepresenting the character of that sonship, of which divine assurance had just been given." He was permitted to have his way and employ all his power against Jesus.

The temptations, according to Matthew, culminated in three special attacks at the end of the forty days of fasting, when Jesus was physically least able to resist, and exhausted by "a prolonged period of intense spiritual strain." All the temptations center in an attack on Jesus' sonship, in an attempt to get Him by act to deny that sonship.

In the first, Jesus was asked to discredit His sonship by a wrong use of His power to satisfy hunger, in the second by a needless and presumptuous test of the Father's power to protect Him in self-imposed danger, and in the third by aping the ways of the earth in fulfilling the divine purpose. He was asked to show His power, if He had any as the Son of God; then He was asked to prove His claim that God would care for Him; then He was asked to ignore God's plans and use Satan's plans. These attacks were on His body, His personal pride and His lately accepted mission.

The triumph was complete for the time, and Satan left Him, having been unable to withstand the weapon Jesus used. Jesus was a skilled swordsman, and His sword was the Word of God. With Scripture quotations Jesus felled Satan. Jesus remained sole possessor of the field.

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

THE DOUBLE BAPTISM

Jesus was baptized by John with water; He was also baptized with the Holy Spirit. This double baptism was an innovation in baptizing. It had not been so done before. The symbolism of the washing with water was complemented with the coming of the Spirit to dwell in Him.

It is easy nowadays to limit the thought of baptism to the water and the outward form of baptizing. Too many regard it as a rite to be performed, as the naming of the baby, as a ceremony connected with uniting with the Church. More than this it does not mean to them. They expect nothing from God in the baptism. They find it hard to realize that the saying of the words of the baptismal formula, "Into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," is the vital part of the baptism and that true baptism involves not only the use of water but also the reception of divine blessing which the Trinity provides.

CONFIDENCE ESTABLISHED

Jesus needed to be sure of Himself. He was making a great venture. He was facing a life work which demanded that He be greater than any man. He came to John for baptism and John performed that rite, as he had been doing it for others. Jesus needed no baptism of repentance unto remission of sins. But He did need assurance from God that He was approved for His mission. He received a double testimony and He knew that He was ready for His ministry.

We face our tasks for God. We see them loom high and hard before us. We wonder whether it is God's will that we should undertake the work and whether we are qualified to meet its requirements. Like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and other prophets, like Paul and other missionaries, like Luther and other reformers, we need confidence established that we are wanted for the task and that we can carry it through. The testimony of the Spirit and the promises of God's Word are sources of this confidence. Somehow there is given to the earnest Christian the attitude and confidence of Paul and with him he says, "I know him whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to guard that which I have committed unto him." As the task goes on the confidence grows; "I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me."

TESTED FOR STRENGTH

We live in a time of tests for everything that man is to use. Standards for determining the strenuousness and the extent of the test are arrived at by a complicated procedure. When the standard has been established, methods of tests are prepared to determine whether this or that can be used. If it qualifies by standard it is approved; if it does not it is discarded. The best by test is the slogan we demand.

People themselves are tested to find their qualification for position or service. We demand the approved man. We will not tolerate the untried. We are unwilling to run any risks in trusting ourselves or our interests to others. This is true in listing employees, in employing edu-

cators, in calling ministers, in hiring chauffeurs; in common with careful people we test for strength. We want to be sure they will make good.

Jesus had just been acclaimed as the Son of God. He had received the Holy Spirit. He had the endorsement for His ministry. But, could He stand preliminary tests to prove His strength, His loyalty, His devotion to duty? Satan was to test Him for strength.

PHYSICAL DESIRES CONTROLLED

Jesus was hungry. Food was available by His own power, as Satan suggested. But His power as God's Son was not to be so used. Would physical desire control Him, or could He control physical desire? He dismissed the iniquitous thought of being mastered by the physical when to do so would have destroyed His loyalty and faith as God's Son. He was strong enough to do right in spite of physical impulses to do wrong.

These uncontrolled physical desires drag us down too low to be classed as the sons of God; not that the desires are evil in themselves, but they must not be allowed to master us. Slaves of the physical cannot be honored servants of God. The strength we have is not to be spent always and entirely to satisfy the body. The world is full of wrecked lives, wasted too soon and useless too early, because Satan's suggestion to "live by bread alone" has been followed.

PRIDE AND PRESUMPTION CONQUERED

To show Satan and the world that He was under special care as God's Son had a natural appeal to pride. To dare danger and be miraculously saved would make Him a marvel, a wonder-man in His day. But Jesus conquered pride. He refused to test God's care when unnecessary. He put Satan aside as a false suggester. He had confidence in His Father; He needed no special proof.

Pride is the delusion of many. They want to show off. They think public applause is worth striving for even at risking unsensible actions. They are presumptions. They see the life guard and wade beyond their depth. They read of antidotes and take poison. They count their money and become extravagant. They read God's promises of forgiveness and run into sins. They think it smart to be wicked. They are proud of their risks and presumptuous as to safety.

CONVENIENCE AND EASE REFUSED

Satan offered a short, easy way to world mastery, but Jesus spurned the offer and remained true to His mission. It meant the way of the cross, but that long, hard way was best. He refused to sacrifice principle for convenience and ease. Here is our much-needed example for today. Youth need it and so do all of us. This satanic suggestion makes the gambler, the thug, the thief. Jesus would not steal the world's kingdoms, nor take them as gifts; He would win them.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

Where had Jesus lived prior to the return to Galilee? What had He done? Where had He first met the four fishermen, whom He called? How did Jesus conduct His public ministry? What were His greatest activities.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 4: 12-25. (Print verses 17-25.)

(American Standard Revision Text)

17. From that time began Jesus to preach, and to say, Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

18. And walking by the sea of Galilee, he saw two brethren, Simon who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishers.

19. And he saith unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you fishers of men.

20. And they straightway left the nets, and followed him.

21. And going on from thence he saw two other brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them.

22. And they straightway left the boat and their father, and followed him.

23. And Jesus went about in all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of disease and all manner of sickness among the people.

24. And the report of him went forth into all Syria: and they brought unto him all that were sick, holden with divers diseases and torments, possessed with demons, and epileptic, and palsied; and he healed them.

25. And there followed him great multitudes from Galilee and Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judæa and from beyond the Jordan.

GOLDEN TEXT: Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.—Matthew 4: 17.

LESSON GOAL: To show how Jesus began His public ministry.

LESSON PLAN

I. JESUS RETURNS TO GALILEE (12-17).

1. Why He went.
2. Where He lived.
3. What He preached.

II. JESUS CALLS FOUR FISHERMEN (18-22).

1. Who they were.
2. What He asked.
3. How they responded.

III. JESUS IN HIS PUBLIC MINISTRY (23-25).

1. His Activities.
2. Reports Broadcast.
3. Results.

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

Verse 18: *Casting a net into the sea; for they were fishers.*—The sea of Galilee was prolific with edible fish, and fishermen lived by catching and marketing them. Fishing was done with cast-nets, or drag-nets. It takes much skill to use the cast-net. The fisherman stands in the water up to his waist and when he sees signs of fish he throws the net with a peculiar twirl so that it spreads out and falls flat on the water. The edges are weighted and the net sinks to the bottom, enclosing the fish. The first disciples were fishers.

Verse 23: *Their synagogue.*—The synagogue was erected on an elevation, and was distinguished by a high pole, as a church is by a steeple. Synagogues on river banks were not unknown. The synagogue was the place for worship on Sabbath and on two week days. It was also a

court where offenses were tried, sentences pronounced and punishments inflicted. It was the place of the school, both for ordinary education and for the priesthood.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

Following the temptation of Jesus came the events recorded in John 1:19—4:45. Report reached Jesus of the imprisonment of John the Baptist and He went out of Judæa into Galilee. Jesus chose to go through Samaria rather than risk the fate of John, by passing through Perea. This gave Him opportunity for proclaiming the truth in Samaria. Naturally, He went to His home in Nazareth, and began preaching. His own people rejected Him and He went to Capernaum, where He was to dwell. Then began His Galilean ministry.

Capernaum was an important city at the north end of the Sea of Galilee. It was "a busy place. Two caravan routes passed through the town. It had a custom-house and a Roman garrison." Here are found extensive ruins, including those of an ancient synagogue, seventy-five feet in length and sixty-five in breadth, which, it is supposed, may be the place where Jesus taught the people and healed the man with an unclean spirit. Capernaum stood in a great thoroughfare. Roads led out from it in all directions—northwesterly to Damascus and the cities on the Euphrates and Tigris; easterly to Gilead; southerly to Shechem and Jerusalem; and westerly past Nazareth to the Mediterranean coast.

The site of Capernaum is disputed but the general agreement is that Tell Hum is the location of the ancient city, the headquarters of our Lord during His Galilean ministry. Today it is a mass of ruins, which indicate that in earlier centuries it had large buildings, and was the center of extensive trade.

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

Not being an historian and caring little for the chronology of the life of Jesus, Matthew omits events between the temptation and the opening of the Galilean ministry of Jesus. In our lesson we have an introductory statement given which is followed by some of the teaching and work of Jesus. Matthew gathers his materials and groups them under topics, rather than fitting them together in the order of their taking place.

JESUS RETURNS TO GALILEE

John the Baptist's work at Bethabara, or Bethany beyond Jordan, came to an untimely conclusion by his imprisonment and later execution. Jesus knew that if His herald was so treated, it was unsafe for Him to tarry in that region. There was nothing to be gained by needless risks. Besides there would be better opportunity for His ministry in Galilee, where the prejudicial opposition of Jewish leaders would not hinder Him so much. Accordingly, Jesus taking with Him the six disciples, some of whom had been directed to Him by John the Baptist, Jesus made His eventful journey by way of Samaria to Galilee and began His public preaching, using, temporarily, Nazareth as headquarters. It seems probable that Simon, Andrew, John and James had gone to Capernaum to resume their fishing trade and live at their own homes. It is clear that both the imprisonment of John the Baptist and the plots of the Pharisees against Jesus explain *why He went* back into Galilee.

Where He lived is matter of interest. Nazareth did not afford opportunity for His ministry. Besides His home town rejected Him (Luke 4:16-31), threatening His life. Capernaum was the influential

center. Messages delivered there would probably be largely distributed by travelers. However, Jesus was not craving publicity. He wanted to establish Himself in a group of disciples whom He might prepare for apostolic ministry. The fact that the few men who had come to Him from John the Baptist lived in Capernaum may have influenced His choice of Capernaum.

Matthew saw in the locating of Jesus at Capernaum the fulfillment of an old prophecy which he translated rather freely and applies inferentially to the condition. The despised region where Capernaum was located was regarded as dark and repulsive, as "the region and shadow of death." The prophecy had promised a transforming event for this region, and the coming of Jesus was interpreted by Matthew as the realization of the promise.

Jesus had a message; He was a preacher. *What He preached* sounded much like the stirring message of John the Baptist. Prior to this Jesus had done little public preaching. His great messages to Nicodemus and the woman at Jacob's well were privately spoken. His first public attempt at Nazareth was a shameful failure. He took the plan John the Baptist had used and spoke in the same terms. As the Messiah He could declare the presence of the kingdom of heaven; He was the King and as He gathered subjects, they with Him constituted the kingdom.

JESUS CALLS FOUR FISHERMEN

We are told *who they were*. They were Simon, whom Andrew, his brother, a follower of John the Baptist, had brought to Jesus, when they were beyond the Jordan. Andrew and Simon were fishermen; their father's name was John, and their home was Bethsaida, where Philip lived and where "the Greek-speaking element was probably strong." There were James and John, sons of a well-to-do fisherman named Zebedee. James is mentioned first, probably because at that time he was more prominent than John; he had been brought to Jesus by John, who was also a disciple of John the Baptist.

Jesus walked along the shore of Galilee near Capernaum and saw among the many fishermen the familiar faces of friends. Simon and Andrew were standing in the water near shore, casting a net; James and John were in a boat with their father and servants busily mending their nets. *What He asked* of them was a command, or request, and a promise, in which there may have been a challenge. He told them to come with Him and He would make them fishers of men. This was said to the net-casters. The others, the net-menders, were hailed by Him. Maybe He offered them also the new work of fishing for men.

How they responded is surprising. The first pair left their nets and the second pair left the boat and their father and the four followed Him. It was the beginning of the unbroken companionship with Him while He remained on earth. Mark informs us that there were servants to care for Zebedee; there was nothing heartless in their leaving him. Very likely he consented to their going. Their mother, Salome, became a worshiper of Jesus; she "is perhaps to be identified with the sister of

the Lord's mother." We do not know that Zebedee became a worshiper of Jesus; however, he did not oppose his sons in their doing so.

JESUS IN HIS PUBLIC MINISTRY

Verses 23-25. The prospectus of Jesus' ministry in Galilee is, in these verses, a kind of general indication of *His activities*. Using Capernaum as His headquarters He traveled now and then through the province until all Galilee had a chance to hear, or at least know about, His message. Both in His method and in the inclusiveness of His work Jesus was different from John the Baptist. He traveled to the people; John waited for them to come to him. John avoided the synagogue; Jesus visited the synagogue and taught there. Jesus added to His teaching and preaching the ministry of healing. Wherever Jesus went He was ready to teach and to help. So He was busy teaching and expounding the Scriptures, preaching the good tidings concerning the kingdom and healing the afflicted.

The *reports broadcast* concerning Jesus and His work reached the people of a broad area. His reputation was known throughout the Roman province of Syria, extending from "Egypt on the south to the Euphrates eastward, and to the borders of Cilicia and Cappadocia on the north." He must have been much talked about, for this was largely the method of spreading news.

The *results* were in the bringing to Him of afflicted persons for healing. These afflictions included many kinds. "Disease seems to refer to positive and acute disorders, like fever, leprosy, and blindness; sickness to the various forms of debility. The torments included mania, epilepsy and paralysis." (*Prof. Slater*). Another result was the enlarged multitude of followers, who came from Galilee, Decapolis (this was a confederacy of ten cities east and southeast of the sea of Galilee), Jerusalem, Judæa and Peræa, the region beyond Jordan. A ministry so active, so widely known was sure to have large results.

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

WHAT A SERMON

John preached about sin and repentance. Jesus had the same message. He began with sin. His mission was to save people from their sins. It is not surprising that He took the most repulsive and unpopular theme for His sermon. He could not have done otherwise and been true to the eternal plan of God. The great love of God had sent Him to seek and to save the lost. He must first make it clear that the people needed to be saved. Repentance was necessary to salvation, but repentance never comes except where there is a realization of sin. Sin was His theme; repentance was His exhortation; the nearness of the kingdom was His argument. What a sermon!

Sin-denouncing sermons are not very popular with the masses. Sin seems old-fashioned as a pulpit theme. The preacher who talks about sin and calls for repentance is rather out of date. Why is this? Sin is not despised today, because its practice is quite common and sinners are not

debarred from any place, it seems. Wickedness is condoned even in the best circles. Its evils are excused and covered up by press and movies. But, there is no change in the fact that the way to God's favor is as Jesus declared, "Repent ye."

TAKING A VENTURE

This is just what Jesus did when He called four men to prepare them to carry on His work. The eternal plans of divine love were in Jesus' keeping. They were to be entrusted to men. To what men? Who would be fit for such an exacting task? There were plenty of men, but Jesus chose these four as having promising traits and called them as the nucleus of His world-evangelizing organization. He was taking a great venture.

Jesus has never ceased taking ventures. It is His venture when He invites anyone to become a Christian. He risks the honor of His name every time He allows anyone to be His follower and be called a Christian. He ventures when He calls a man into the ministry. Sometimes His cause suffers as a result of the venture, though such suffering is rare. What venture has He made with you? How much has He entrusted to your keeping? Is His venture in you working out satisfactorily to Him?

PROMOTION INVOLVING COST

The four fishermen were highly honored by being called by Jesus. It was a distinctive promotion. Viewed from our standpoint no men ever received such promotion. But it was to cost them something. It meant forsaking their livelihood and taking chances with Jesus. It meant leaving home and for two of them leaving a father. It meant a whole life of unforeseen struggle and much suffering. But it was a promotion worth vastly more than all its cost.

Promotions always bring added costs. The higher position increases responsibility. The step up in the world calls for greater care and exposes to worse dangers. Advancement in Christian life, while a promotion to be coveted, entails larger costs. The teacher works more than the pupils; it is the cost of being a teacher. Election to the church council is a promotion but it brings costly duties, requiring time, thought, worries and often heartaches. The minister, the missionary, the officials of the church at large, pay much and often for their promotion. But the true worker for God welcomes the promotion not as a personal honor but as an enlarging chance to serve God.

MINISTRY IN THREE PHASES

Jesus discharged His ministry as teacher, preacher, and healer. He had instruction for the head, nurture and comfort for the heart and help for the body. He aimed to meet every human need. He was the exceptional teacher, the example great teachers since have followed; He was a great preacher; dealing with principles that fit life day by day, and prepare it for eternal joys; He was a great healer, ministering to human ills. His concern for the physical is reflected in His followers through

every agency for bodily health and comfort now fostered in Christian lands.

Can we imitate Him today? Some of us may teach, never as well as He did, but as well as we can, striving always to learn more of His methods. Some of us may preach, and our preaching must be judged as good or not by the preaching of Jesus. None of us can heal as Jesus did, but all of us can help care for health, our own and others. The Christian can try to walk in His steps.

LARGEST INTEREST NOT ALWAYS THE HIGHEST

What made Jesus so popular? What report about Him traveled farthest and stirred up the most people to go to Him? Was it what He taught? Was it His preaching? Were the largest interests of the multitude that gathered about Him from Syria the highest? They came because of physical ills; they wanted afflicted bodies healed. His messages from God were disregarded; His power to heal was exalted. He had not been sent to the earth as a miraculous healer of the diseased, and yet He healed those brought to Him.

We have not journeyed far in advance of the old magnetism of Jesus. There are still people who follow Him for physical, material reasons. Some Christians treasure Him because they hope for gain thereby. They serve Him for the increased business, the better social standing, the passing approval of men. His teaching is not highly valued; men are satisfied with what the world has to tell. His preaching is not taken seriously; men are not wanting to know what He says about sin and repentance. They want the physical, material help; doubtless they have their reward, but they miss the best He has to give.

INCREASING POPULARITY

Multitudes followed Him. They traveled with Him. Had he been eager for crowds, He must have been satisfied. It seemed that He was winning His way with the masses. But what good came of it all? The permanent results—what of these? How many of that gathering, following multitude stuck by Him, ready to accept His teaching, obey His preaching and identify themselves with His kingdom? So far as records go not one of that multitude became a standby for Him in any crisis. They seemed to make Him popular, but it was solely because He pleased them. Jesus could not maintain that popularity without changing His teachings and modifying His preaching. This He did not do.

The community's idol, the nation's hero, the world's statesman, is forgotten and left alone, if by word or deed he fail to please. A minister was lauded and followed by his congregation. He preached against a far too common sin and they turned him out. The price of popularity is too often the suppression of the truth.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

What is the Sermon on the Mount? What are the Beatitudes? How did Jesus define His relation to the law? How would He have us treat our enemies?

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 5:1-48. (Print verses 3-9, 17-20, 43-48.)
(American Standard Revision Text)

3. Blessed are the poor in spirit:
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4. Blessed are they that mourn: for
they shall be comforted.

5. Blessed are the meek: for they
shall inherit the earth.

6. Blessed are they that hunger and
thirst after righteousness: for they shall
be filled.

7. Blessed are the merciful: for they
shall obtain mercy.

8. Blessed are the pure in heart:
for they shall see God.

9. Blessed are the peacemakers: for
they shall be called sons of God.

17. Think not that I came to de-
stroy the law or the prophets: I came
not to destroy, but to fulfil.

18. For verily I say unto you, Till
heaven and earth pass away, one jot
or one tittle shall in no wise pass
away from the law, till all things be
accomplished.

19. Whosoever therefore shall break
one of these least commandments, and
shall teach men so, shall be called
least in the kingdom of heaven; but

whosoever shall do and teach them, he
shall be called great in the kingdom of
heaven.

20. For I say unto you, that except
your righteousness shall exceed *the*
righteousness of the scribes and Phari-
sees, ye shall in no wise enter into the
kingdom of heaven.

43. Ye have heard that it was
said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and
hate thine enemy:

44. but I say unto you, Love your
enemies, and pray for them that per-
secute you;

45. that ye may be sons of your
Father who is in heaven: for he mak-
eth his sun to rise on the evil and the
good, and sendeth rain on the just and
the unjust.

46. For if ye love them that love you,
what reward have ye? do not even the
publicans the same?

47. And if ye salute your brethren
only, what do ye more *than others?*
do not even the Gentiles the same?

48. Ye therefore shall be perfect, as
your heavenly Father is perfect.

GOLDEN TEXT: Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.—
Matthew 5:8.

LESSON GOAL: To show what Jesus prescribes for the character and conduct of
His followers.

LESSON PLAN

I. THE BLESSED OF THE KINGDOM (1-12).

II. THE OFFICE OF THE KING'S SUBJECTS (13-16).

III. THE AUTHORITY OF THE KING (17-20).

IV. THE CONDUCT OF THE KING'S SUBJECTS.

1. As to the Law Against Murder (21-26).

2. As to the Law Against Impurity (27-32).

3. As to the Law Against Swearing (33-37).

4. A New Way of Revenge (38-42).

5. A New Way with Enemies (43-48).

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

Verse 18: *Jot or tittle*.—"Jot" refers to the smallest letter of the
Hebrew alphabet. It is usually silent and has value only as a helper of
other letters. Its presence or absence determines meanings frequently.
It makes the difference between Sarai and Sarah, Hoshea and Joshua.
"Tittle" means "a little horn," or a small point used in writing Hebrew

to distinguish certain letters. Apparently insignificant, the "tittle" had much value. To drop a "jot" or omit a "tittle" could be done easily; it was likely to happen.

Verse 20: *Except your righteousness exceed.*—To the scribes righteousness meant "punctilious veneration for the letter of the Scripture." They were fanatical literalists, basing their religiousness on external conformity to minutest details. The Pharisees were extremists in liturgical precision, and regarded this as their standard of righteousness. Jesus did not denounce these. He asked that purer practices should be followed and that all should be done for spiritual purposes.

Verse 46: *Publicans.*—Formerly publicans were Roman officials who sold to others the right to collect taxes. The term was later applied to the men who bought the privilege and heartlessly, often dishonestly, gathered the taxes. Usually they were "the least patriotic and most degraded of the population," and were deservedly hated.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

Matthew was not a chronologist. He did not concern himself with strict adherence to the order of the happenings. His purpose in writing did not demand this. Between the last lesson and this occurred many important matters recorded by the other evangelists and by Matthew himself in later chapters. Part of His great Galilean ministry preceded the delivery of the Sermon on the Mount. It was after the choosing of the twelve disciples that He spoke to them as Matthew records in chapters five to seven. Many think that Matthew here assembled many statements made by Jesus at different times and wove them into a connected discourse, just as he brought miracles and parables together.

Besides his supreme purpose of exhibiting our Lord to the Jewish compatriots as their promised Messiah, St. Matthew had also the subordinate but more generally needful and abiding purpose of recording His teaching. And hereof a striking example is furnished by this long discourse which ever since it was so entitled by St. Augustine has been known as "the Sermon on the Mount."—*David Smith.*

The scene was clearly in Galilee, near Capernaum, but the exact mountain cannot be designated. Tradition, from the twelfth century, indicates the Horns of Hattin, "a square-shaped hill with two tops about five miles north of Tiberias." On the road between Tiberias and Nazareth this "hill" is pointed out as the Mount of Beatitudes. It seems to fit into Matthew's setting to regard the place as "the high land bordering on the lake behind Tell Hum, which the inhabitants of those places would naturally call the mountain."

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

The Sermon on the Mount has "won universal recognition as the supreme statement of the ethical duties of man" and has "been accepted as a statement of the ideal Christian standard of life," but it must be remembered that Jesus addressed it to His disciples and not to the wide world. Its chief concern is "with the elements of the Christian character and of the spiritual life. It is not primarily a treatise on social science." It emphasizes required marks of conduct in a Christian.

THE BLESSED OF THE KINGDOM

Verses 1-12. Jesus did not despise the multitude, but He withdrew from it and went apart with His disciples to give them intimate instruction. He went up the hill back of Capernaum; He sat down, a teacher's posture; His disciples gathered about Him; He presented to them a

formal discourse, beginning with "a series of benedictions which, paradoxical as they appear to us, would be intelligible and inspiring to their Jewish minds." These beatitudes have an Oriental setting and content but embody principles that abide. They have an impelling, encouraging message, full of meaning "for those who have already consecrated themselves to Him."

The coming happiness is assured for the poor. Luke suggests that this means poor in material possessions. Matthew says it means poor in spirit. Both are right. The background was the teaching and practice of the day. The rich meet every requirement easily. Their tithes were large and about them they boasted. They thought to have favor with God for their good works. They felt little dependence on God because their money procured everything for them. They had no attitude of reverence, no feeling of spiritual poverty. Matthew writing to Jews emphasized the poverty of spirit, which many Jews did not realize, and so felt no need of repentance. The kingdom of heaven would not be desired by the proud in spirit; only to the poor in spirit was it promised.

Back of the fact of mourning was the calamitous condition of Jerusalem. It included also mourning over spiritual poverty. It may be extended to cover any deep mourning over sins. We like to put into it all kinds of heart sorrow. The promised comfort has to do with contact with Christ as members of His kingdom.

The history of the Jews was that not by might and fighting did they gain Canaan; but it was a gift, an inheritance from Jehovah. In their meekness they received their possessions. Jesus' kingdom was not based on national, or material power; it was for the meek, the dependent on Him, as an inheritance. It was to be a wide-spreading kingdom, ultimately occupying the earth. The boastfulness of Christ's day is an Oriental characteristic. Meekness is denounced as weakness. Jesus put a premium on Christian meekness.

The quest for righteousness was prominent among the Jews. They wanted to stand well with God. The term "hunger and thirst" expressed the intensity of the felt need. But Pharisees conducted the quest seeking God's favor through intricate and extensive ceremonials. Their desire seemed to be superficial rather than from the heart. But the righteousness that meets all divine requirements must exceed that of the Pharisees. Jesus' disciples wanted that greater righteousness. Their sincere desire would be satisfied.

The Old Testament and the New, but especially Jesus, exalted showing mercy as a mark of righteousness before God. Mercifulness was not practised extensively by Jewish priests or Roman rulers. Jesus called for showing mercy and promised God's mercy in return.

The old idea of purity was ceremonial and dealt mostly with external matters. Jesus taught a heart purity as a means of seeing God. To see God is the climax of spiritual privilege. It was talked about and longed for by all Jews. Jesus gave the prescription for Christians to fill.

Jesus had not come to wage war, break down kingdoms and set up a throne. He was the Peace-bringer. His followers must have peace in self, through being forgiven of sins, and peace with others through willingness to forgive. Then they too would be sons of God, like Him the Son of God, the Peacemaker.

With profound sympathy Jesus looked at His disciples realizing their struggles and sufferings in trying to obey the principles of the beatitudes. He added two "blesseds" and a call for joy, and pointed to promises that would be their stay and encouragement. He made these promises exceedingly personal.

THE OFFICE OF THE KING'S SUBJECTS

Verses 13-16. Jesus definitely set forth what His disciples were to be in their world. The uses of salt and of light were readily understood. The transition from the figurative to the real would be easy for their thinking. Unusable salt and an unused light were worthless; but both were of great worth to meet evident needs. There were warnings against failure and exhortations for faithfulness in these plain words of Jesus.

THE AUTHORITY OF THE KING

Verses 17-20. The disciples trained in the Jewish law might have suspicioned that Jesus was revolutionary against the law. In promising the blessings, it might have seemed to them that Jesus was putting the law aside. To correct such false conclusions, Jesus uttered this paragraph. Jesus was not there to belittle but to uphold the law. He made this fact clear by stressing the value of exact interpretation of the law, and of strictly keeping every part of that law. No part of it was too small to be obeyed. Position in God's kingdom could not be gained or maintained without keeping the law. But it must be more than external, formal adherence, such as the Pharisees counted for righteousness; it was to be a positive outcome of a sincere heart.

THE CONDUCT OF THE KING'S SUBJECTS

It was a new type of kingdom Jesus was establishing. It called for a kind of conduct that would be irreproachable before man and God. Jesus cited five conduct phases to be observed as subjects of the King.

As to the law against murder they were to keep it, but they were to do more; they were not even to allow the impulse of envy or revenge to express itself in any harmful act. *As to the law against impurity*, to them it was to mean not only a sinful act committed, but also the evil desire, or the encouragement of the desire by using the eyes. *As to the law against swearing*, for followers of Christ it was to debar them from "the light and arbitrary appeal in ordinary talk to sacred things." He set forth *a new way of revenge*; it was not a matter of getting even, of returning evil for evil in like kind and amount, but of doing good for evil, of giving kindness to offenders. Jesus set up *a new way with enemies*. He contrasted the old hatred and its results with the ideal of love and its gracious generosity. "The standard of perfection now

demand and promised is not that of adherence to the law but of a love as comprehensive as the love of God." (*Micklem*).

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

A BACKGROUND FOR BLESSINGS

Human needs and the conditions within and surrounding the life must always be the background of blessings. Coupled with this must be some able and willing person from whom the blessings can come. Blessings may be directed to physical, or to any other needs. The little child and the loving parent constitute the background for blessings for the child. The oppressed race or nation and the generous-hearted, open-handed neighbor provide such a background. Hunger and thirst and nakedness and exposure together with the opportunity, capacity and willingness to work make up the background for comfort to the individual. An unlearned, undeveloped mind and a school with trained and willing teachers are the enabling background for education. The unfledged but potentially soaring spiritual life together with the offered nurture and guidance of God are the exclusive background of soul strength and culture. In all these backgrounds Jesus' interest is manifested in the Sermon on the Mount.

BLESSINGS THAT BALANCE NEEDS

Three great needs and three blessings provided to satisfy them was the proposed schedule of Jesus. The poverty of spirit is offset by the ownership of the heavenly kingdom; the depression of mourning is supplanted by the uplift of comfort; the unpromising humbleness is rewarded by incalculable inheritance. The way of Jesus with blessings is the unexpected way; He gives blessings where the world would dictate, "no blessings possible."

This is the Christian's unique place among men. He has the special promise of blessings to balance his needs. He does not make his own blessings; he merely displays traits of character, suggested by Jesus, and the blessings come. This is the assurance that lifts the burden from the oppressed; it gives the toiling worker for God the will to stand by his task. Ministers of all ranks, teachers under all conditions, Christians of every kind face their needs with submissiveness because of this assurance.

BLESSINGS THAT REWARD

Not all the blessings God bestows are to meet human needs. He has rewards for the worthy. Jesus noted this fact and set it forth for the encouragement of Christians in trying to have a conduct that is in keeping with their profession. Do they strive to live so righteously as to be approved of men and of God? They shall have it even to the full. Do they show mercy to others? God's great mercy shall be theirs. Do they spew out impurity as a despised thing? God will unveil His face before them. Do they seek to be at peace with all men? God will call them sons, honored companions of His Son, the Prince of Peace.

It pays to have Christian conduct. Jesus declared this. We can depend on it. We have seen examples of it; promotions and honors and

rewards, even the business world gives to the men of right conduct. There is a premium on the man who can be trusted; he is wanted because he merits rewards.

MORE THAN UPHOLDING THE LAW

Just to keep the law, to be within the law, to miss criminality and consequent punishment, is not the mark of the best citizen. High idealism, on the other hand, gives no liberties with law. The law must be obeyed, but the best citizen avoids the suggestion, the thought, the winking at, the approach to any possible temptation to transgress the law, whether it be a nation's or God's.

Jesus put motive above deed. He made sin to consist in more than overt crime. He ranked evil desire with open sins. He condemned secret thought about the corrupt. His mission was to live so far beyond the letter of the law that He would not besmirch His life by contact with a thought contrary to the spirit of the law. We have some much-opposed laws and men secretly break them and are justly termed criminals. We have others who kill the spirit of the laws, though avoiding criminal acts, but they too are at heart equally criminal.

A HARD BUT HAPPY WAY

It is a long climb from the natural to the Christian treatment of enemies. The reversion to the vengeance type, the get-even practice, the enjoyed deeds of hate is quite true of all of us. Only fear checks many of us from the sly and scheming deed in the dark. Jesus proposed a hard way with enemies, a very hard way for Christians to pursue. Can enemies be loved? Jesus would not ask the impossible. Can prayer be sincere for enemies? Jesus prayed that way. God does not withhold His gifts from the wicked. Maybe it is hard for Him to be kind to the unjust but He does it. What a fleeting satisfaction it is to get vengeance! How much we have blushed over our spite-work!

THE PERFECTION POSSIBLE

A perfect Christian! Have you seen one? Do you believe one is to be found? What did Jesus mean by being perfect? Read the preceding verses. They tell how God's inclusive love exercised itself. It lacked nothing. It was perfect in all its dealings. Jesus is asking the Christian not for freedom from all sins of thought and deed, but for a perfect manifestation of love, even to the love of enemies. There are three words for perfect in the New Testament: one means fully adapted to a purpose; another, entire, having lost nothing; another, fully developed, complete. The last is used here. When Jesus says, "Ye therefore shall be perfect," He suggests the growth in practicing love, a love as comprehensive as God's love.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

What is a hypocrite? How were they rewarded? What is meant by "in secret" as applied to the Father? Contrast earth-stored and heaven-stored treasures. What figures of speech are used and what did Jesus mean by them? What is wrong with being anxious?

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 6: 1-34. (Print verses 5-13, 19-21, 31-33.)
(American Standard Revision Text)

5. And when ye pray, ye shall not be as the hypocrites: for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have received their reward.

6. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thine inner chamber, and having shut thy door, pray to thy Father who is in secret, and thy Father who seeth in secret shall recompense thee.

7. And in praying use not vain repetitions, as the Gentiles do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

8. Be not therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.

9. After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

10. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth.

11. Give us this day our daily bread.

12. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

13. And bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

19. Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth, where moth and rust consume, and where thieves break through and steal:

20. but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth consume, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:

21. for where thy treasure is, there will thy heart be also.

31. Be not therefore anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?

32. For after all these things do the Gentiles seek; for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

33. But seek ye first his kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

GOLDEN TEXT: Seek ye first his kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.—Matthew 6: 33.

LESSON GOAL: So to adjust our lives that we shall pray to God sincerely and put Him and His kingdom foremost among all our interests.

LESSON PLAN

I. SINCERE VERSUS FORMAL PRAYER (Vs. 5-13).

1. The Place of Prayer.
2. The Scope of Prayer.
3. The Spirit of Prayer.

II. IMPERISHABLE VERSUS PERISHABLE RICHES (Vs. 19-21).

1. The Failure of Earthly Riches.
2. The Endurance of Heavenly Riches.
3. Heart and Riches Wedded.

III. SIMPLE FAITH VERSUS ANXIOUS CARE (Vs. 31-33).

1. The Secondary Character of Material Comforts.
2. The Primary Character of God's Kingdom.

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

Verse 5: *Stand and pray*.—It was the custom of the Jews to stand, facing Jerusalem, when they prayed. Those who desired to be considered devout did not follow the public prayers, but offered prayers of their own in a loud tone of voice so that they might attract the attention of the congregation.

Verse 5: *And on the corners of the streets.*—The Oriental street is a mere lane for foot passengers and baggage animals. The chief streets are set apart for a particular trade, or the sale of special commodities, such names as Bread Street, Silversmith's Street, Vegetable Street, etc., being given to them.

Those who were ostentatious were careful to be overtaken by the prayer-hour on the street, where prayers were said with great ceremony; the same people sometimes stand for three hours at a time in the attitude of prayer.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

"The Horns of Hattin" is almost without question the elevation upon which our Lord delivered the Sermon on the Mount. The spot is clearly visible from the Sea of Galilee as one looks westward over the hills. Dr. Geikie describes the mountain very graphically.

"Passing the village of Lubieh, standing over 900 feet above the sea, amidst a forest of olive and fig trees, our road lay straight north towards 'the Horns of Hattin.' This famous spot is reached by a long, gentle slope of pasture land, on which a great herd of black and brown cattle, small and poor, was feeding. Daisies, white and red anemones, the phlox, the iris, the wild mustard, grey and dry thistles, blue hyacinths, and yellow-flowered clover color the open field, which was the counterpart of some unfenced upland common in England. Mole-hills, or what very much resembled them, abounded, and black swifts darted hither and thither after insects. Limestone cropped out at the bottom of the ascent, but was changed for basalt as we got higher up. Gradually the slope sank to a level, green with wheat, which, however, was sadly mixed with yellow mustard weed. The top, reached by climbing a short, rough slope, proved to be a great crater-like space with a slightly hollow floor, set in a frame of rough crags, which inside, at the two ends, rose in a wilderness of stone; outside it swelled into high grassy knolls, 'the Horns of Hattin.' Thousands could stand or sit in the huge circle, though it would be a rough gathering place, for the whole surface is strewn with boulders and fragments of black basalt, as if they had been rained on the earth in a terrible shower. Hattin is the name of a small village on the ridge below. The 'Horns' rise only sixty feet above the ground at their base, but no other heights are visible in this direction from the Lake of Galilee, which lies three or four miles off in its deeply sunk bed. It is only since the Crusades that this spot has been assigned to the Sermon on the Mount, but the position is so strikingly in keeping with intimations of the Gospel narrative as to give great probability to the choice. It is, however, possible that the 'level place' where the multitude assembled and to which the Lord came down, was the plane just below the 'Horns' (Luke 6:17). Easy of access, alike to the peasants in the hills and the fishermen on the shore, no point could have been a better center to which to draw both classes. All the other heights are only members of a continuous chain; at this point, alone, one can speak of 'the mountain' as the eminence detached from others, and standing out from the lower ground. The descent to the lake is by a long, easy slope."

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

SINCERE VERSUS FORMAL PRAYER

Jesus in the early part of this chapter brings to light the abuse of three acts of religion: giving, praying and fasting. There had entered into the religious practices of that day an ostentation that was offensive. As an illustration, the names of those who made large gifts to the poor were announced in the synagogue. Verses 1-4.

The same boastful display had come to be associated with prayer. That men should be pretenders and stage-actors when they prayed, that

they should strike pompous poses in public places and deliberately call attention to themselves, seems scarcely possible. Jesus pilloried the custom that encouraged praying merely to be seen of men, as He did also the mechanical phrases and hollow forms of words in which prayers were couched.

The Place of Prayer. In order that the temptation to pray to be seen of men might be avoided the Master declares that the closet is the most fitting place for prayers to be made. If there is no human ear to hear then we shall be the more disposed to make our prayers to God alone, to whom they should be made. He does not oppose prayer in the bosom of the entire family, or in the congregation. But we soon discover that the person who prays in private will soon be able to pray in public as though he were in private. That is, he will think far less of beautiful phrases, and the best historic forms, and the manner that caters to the tastes of the congregation, than he will of the content of prayer and the spirit in which it is offered. In short God and our needs are to hold the field of our thought while we attempt to lift holy hands to Him.

The Scope of Prayer. It would not be correct to say that Jesus brings every conceivable item of the divine purpose and human need into this prayer which we call *His* prayer. Still it is true that no other prayer of similar length, or in fact of any length, has ever been formulated that includes so much. It would not be child's play to say what is omitted. There are but seven short petitions, but what wealth of meaning is in them. Now we cannot pray these words without real thought. Our minds must be on the words as we say them, and on Him to whom we send them freighted with our praises, aspirations and petitions. One danger that threatens the frequent use we make of this prayer is that it will become common, meaningless. That is what Jesus did not want to happen. It is just what He found fault with the Pharisees for.

The Spirit of Prayer. Offering the prayer is our part, while answering the prayer is God's part. And the answer is more dependent on the sincerity with which it is made than on any other single thing. Suppose we pray for forgiveness, but do not forgive them that have offended us, what happens to our prayer? We have debts to forgive as well as debts to be forgiven. We cannot hope for much from God while we have our heel on the neck of our neighbor. But if we are of a forgiving spirit there is no limit to what God will do for us.

IMPERISHABLE VERSUS PERISHABLE RICHES

Man loves to accumulate. When he is young it is stamps, buttons, badges, banners and the like he hoards up. In later years it is apparel, stocks, houses, gold, silver, and other valuable treasure. He sees them daily. He sees what comfort they appear to bring others. They lie out here just beyond his reach, and he stretches for them. While he is doing that treasures of larger value slip from him. He ceases to have an eye for them. They do not strike him as being of any particularly immediate worth. They are all right perhaps down toward the end of

life, or over in the other world, but as for the present,—well he wants what he can cash in.

Worldly riches perish. They take wings and fly away. We have them today and tomorrow they are gone. So much of what we see transpiring before our eyes looks like chasing bubbles. What Jesus regards as one of man's chief earthly blunders is that he shall make the laying up of earthly treasure the dominant purpose of life.

On the other hand there are heavenly treasures. That does not mean they are unavailable until we reach heaven. It means they are heavenly in character; they belong to the abiding values; they are those graces and good deeds and pure thoughts and wise ways with which God is well pleased. They do not rust, nor can they be stolen.

While we put earthly things first we cannot seek and serve God. Our interests are in the world. Our thoughts weave themselves around mere things. We shall not be very swift to work out our salvation if our hearts are immersed in earthly riches.

SIMPLE FAITH VERSUS ANXIOUS CARE

Jesus has just been speaking of the lilies and the birds, and how the heavenly Father cares for them. They do not sow nor reap, or gather into barns. Now man would starve if he did not do more than that. Still, there is a profound lesson to be learned, not so much in the trustfulness of the flowers and the birds, as in our confidence that God knows all our needs, abundantly loves us and will provide for our daily wants.

The Secondary Character of Material Comforts. Nowhere in the Bible does God lay down the law that it is forbidden to accumulate property for legitimate purposes. He has so made us that we have physical needs. He has made it possible for us to use our possessions for ends of the noblest sort. But it is just as clear from His Word that these things hold a subordinate place. Our food, clothing, shelter, houses, belong on the lower level. They dare not climb up into the skyline of our thinking. They are merely means to higher ends. For that very reason we are not to worry over them. It should not matter so much if Jones has more of this world's goods than I have. When our lives have run their course we shall see that it helped little to waste our lives away with hurrying and scheming and trying to keep up with the financial procession.

The Primary Character of God's Kingdom. We should put His kingdom first in order of time. It should become one of our interests very early in life. If it is lodged rightly in the heart of the child it is not likely to be neglected later on. But what Jesus had in mind here is that it should hold the first place. Nothing else is to take precedence to it. That grows out of its inherent worth. The soul's interests are supreme. The kingdom of God concerns both the temporal and the spiritual, life here and life hereafter. Of all the affairs that engage us it is foremost and supreme, and every man misses the mark who removes it to put something else in its place.

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

FIRST THINGS FIRST

It may not be out of place to call the attention of teachers to the title of this lesson, which is, "Putting God's Kingdom First." It is not needful to remind anyone these days how insistent a score of other things are to occupy the place that the Lord Jesus should hold. I was told the other day that a certain leader had requested a group of young people to make out a list of topics they would like to discuss at their Sunday evening meetings. When the work was done and the list examined it was found that not one of them bore directly on any aspect of religion. Some years ago when the World War was over the papers carried as a headliner, "The Kaiser Abdicates." Well, Jesus has had to abdicate many times too, and divinities of our own making are sitting on the throne He should occupy.

FIRST IN PRAYER

Prayer is the Christian's vital breath. We cannot get along without it and live as children of God should. Nor does the mere saying of prayers meet the requirements. Many people do that who are ignorant of the alphabet of prayer. There is no harm in thinking through one's prayers before one faces the congregation to direct their thought heavenward. There is nothing gained in abandoning beautifully worded petitions for awkward and slipshod ones. But what is all the beauty of them worth if we do not put the heart into them, make them the channels through which we cry unto God, and invest them with the note of sincerity?

FIRST IN REVERENT ATTITUDE

It must amaze us to see how many people there are who stand or sit erect with eyes wide open while prayer is being made to God. You may want to ask me how I know. I shall allow you to answer that question for yourself. It is reasonable to suppose that not much congregational praying is being done if those who are expected to be worshipping are permitting their eyes to wander here and there. Whether we stand, kneel or sit may make little difference, but if God and His kingdom are to be first in our thoughts we shall have to take every precaution to keep our minds from roving. Praying to the Father calls for concentration of the mental and spiritual powers.

FIRST IN LIFE'S PREPARATION

While I am writing these lines there lies in the metropolis of this land the body of one of our truly great preachers awaiting burial. When he was a boy back on the farm in the middle west he would take a book with him to the field when he went out to plow corn. He would plow a round, and then while the horse was resting a moment for a fresh breath he would read a page out of the book. Then he would start on another round, thinking of what that page contained, revolving it in his mind and mastering it. This was his method through the whole day.

I do not know whether he knew at the time he was to study for the

ministry or not, but I do know that he was getting ready to serve God in some sphere. He was not satisfied to plow corn, but while he was doing it he was mixing in a lot of head and heart learning. The books he wrote, the lectures he delivered, and his pulpit power all testify that he set the kingdom of God first in the years of his preparation.

FIRST IN LOVE

There is no sin committed if we want money and try to get it, provided the processes are legitimate. Dr. H. Clay Trumbull once wrote, "We cannot know or enjoy or love the world too much if God's will controls it. Has a mother anything but joy in watching her little daughter's devotion to her doll? Not until the child is so absorbed that she cannot hear her mother's voice. Did any one ever love this world more than Jesus did, yet was any one ever so loyal to the Father's will? Worldliness is not love of the world, but slavishness to it."

FIRST IN INTEREST

Our physical and mental constitution requires material provisions. We would die without them. They may not be the higher things, but they are basic to the higher things. The Saviour accepted for His own comfort and necessity the store of provisions which His disciples and the good women brought to Him daily. How much there is in the words, "They ministered to him of their substance!" But let us not fail to see that in such ministry they were putting the interest of the kingdom first.

FIRST IN SERVICE

It is not enough that we give our money to a good cause, or that we divide our crust of bread with the hungry. There is a personal and definite service we are to render. Call it evangelistic if you will. None of us may be so humble that we cannot think out some ways of extending the boundaries of the kingdom of God. When the jailer said to Paul, "What must I do to be saved?" the apostle answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." That is the only way any of us can be saved. But when Jesus faced the world and contemplated its salvation, He did not say to His disciples, "Believe that the world will be saved." What did He say? He said, "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations." He called for active, personal service. He wanted every talent they had to be invested in this business, whether preachers or not. We have some part in bringing in the kingdom, and the first step toward discharging our responsibility lies in placing the kingdom first and foremost in our lives.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

The first thing to be done in the way of preparation is to read all of chapter seven. Which verse here is the golden rule? How are we to tell whether Christians live up to their profession or not, since we are not able to see whether or not there is faith in the heart? Is it possible for men to call Jesus beautiful names and do many things for Him without being His disciples? What is the rock on which men are to build? What do the rain, floods and winds represent?

WARNINGS AND PROMISES (Temperance Lesson)

Lesson VI
February 9

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 7:1-29. (Print verses 12, 15-27.)
(American Standard Revision Text)

12. All things therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them: for this is the law and the prophets.

15. Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves.

16. By their fruits ye shall know them. Do *men* gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?

17. Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but the corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.

18. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

19. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

20. Therefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

21. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven.

22. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by thy name, and by thy name cast out demons, and by thy name do many mighty works?

23. And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

24. Every one therefore that heareth these words of mine, and doeth them, shall be likened unto a wise man, who built his house upon the rock:

25. and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon the rock.

26. And every one that heareth these words of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand:

27. and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and smote upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall thereof.

GOLDEN TEXT: Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.—Matthew 7:19.

LESSON GOAL: To learn from the warnings of Jesus that sure judgment will be visited upon the corrupt and hypocritical life.

LESSON PLAN

I. TWO RULES (V. 12).

1. The Rule of Gold.
2. The Golden Rule.

II. TWO WAYS (Vs. 13, 14).

1. The Broad Way.
2. The Narrow Way.

III. TWO TREES (Vs. 15-23).

1. The Corrupt Tree.
2. The Good Tree.

IV. TWO FOUNDATIONS (Vs. 24-27).

1. The Foundation of Rock.
2. The Foundation of Sand.

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

Verse 19: *Is hewn down and cast into the fire.*—The scarcity of trees in Palestine is observed immediately by the traveler. Every tree was taxed so heavily that the owner could ill afford to let it stand if it were not a fruit-bearing tree that paid its own way. Fuel being scarce, all other trees are cut down for use as firewood.

Verse 24: *Built his house upon the rock.*—In the hill country where the rocks and stones are abundant, the houses are built of heavy masonry, the walls often being from two to five feet in thickness with

vaulted roof. It is frequently necessary to dig many feet into the earth until a bed of rock is found for a foundation.

On the plains the houses are made of sun-dried bricks which are in reality dried mud. When the torrential rains fall these houses collapse as though constructed of sand.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

Since this lesson is a continuation of the study of the Sermon on the Mount, you are referred to the corresponding section of last week's lesson.

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

TWO RULES

Verse 12, which is the golden rule, may properly be regarded as the climax and conclusion of the section, verses 7-12. We are to ask, and seek and knock; and as surely as we do, God will hear us. And now what shall be our attitude toward those who stand in need of whatever service we may be in a position to render? Jesus cites the case of a father. Will he not grant good rather than evil to his son? If he has the choice between a fish and a serpent, which will he give him?

If our conduct is being determined by *the rule of gold* it is easy to see how we shall put ourselves first and others second. The rule of gold is nothing short of the rule that places self in the prominent position. It takes little account of the needs and merits of others. The fatherly spirit, the commonly accepted humane spirit, is only feebly present. When our Lord declared to His disciples that they were to do to others as they would have others do to them, He was setting a standard that would of necessity take this essentially selfish world a long time to reach. The greatest sin we have to overcome is the sin of self-centeredness. The rule of gold is not the rule of the kingdom.

We are told that, when Jesus spoke these words which we have prized so highly that we call them *the golden rule*, He was saying nothing new. There is a sense in which that is true. He Himself said that it is the teaching of the law and the prophets. This precept embodies the best spirit that is contained in the law of Moses and the prophets. But we also know how far short the Jews came of attaining unto it. They never thought of making it a rule for international relations. And they did not even apply it among themselves. Who does not know how they oppressed the widow and the orphan, even in Jesus' day? The rich and powerful exacted unjustly from the poor and the powerless. The woes of our Lord were directed against that class. What He did was to bring together in a single verse the finest teaching of the Old Testament on this subject.

Now as to the teaching of heathen philosophers. They had maxims of a similar character, but these were stated in the negative. For instance, Confucius said, "What you do not like, when done to yourself, do not do to others." Socrates spoke similarly. And the teachings of these men deserve our study. But Jesus took a long step in advance of all of them when He stated the precept in a positive way. We are to

go further than to withhold evil from others, we are positively to do them good. This is the golden rule.

TWO WAYS

Verses 13 and 14 are not in the print passage, but they are in the assigned lesson, and serve to complete the picture Jesus is presenting by way of contrasts. In the Orient small gates are common, for they foster privacy, and they keep out animals and whatever else may not be desirable. Where there are broad ways and gates everything coming along may enter.

Jesus seizes on this orientalism to enforce a much-needed lesson. What is the narrow way, or the narrow gate? Let us say it is the golden rule. Jesus still has that in mind. It is an exclusive rule. Only a few are willing to adopt it. Those who cling to their sins and hypocrisies and will not give them up are forced to stay out. It is as easy for a camel to go through the eye of a needle as for an unrighteous man to pass through this gate.

With the broad way we have the other side of the story. Any one can walk in it. It makes few or no requirements. To go that way one does not need repent and be regenerated; he does not need give up any of his sins, or submit his life to the obedience of Jesus. That is why it is crowded. It is easy to go that way.

TWO TREES

The two types of prophets, or teachers, are likened to corrupt and good trees. Jesus had to face these false teachers. Sometimes what they said had a half truth in it, which not infrequently is worse than total error. How they did twist the Old Testament teachings to suit their own desire!

These teachers were false in three respects: first, they claimed to be sent from God and to be teaching His truth, while as a matter of fact they were teaching doctrines at variance with the clear will of God; second, they were actuated by the desire for earthly gain; they were hirelings and not good shepherds; and third, their teachings may have had a sound of orthodoxy in them, but they were not productive of a new life. The teachers themselves were like corrupt trees, bringing forth evil fruit. What they said was cast into a formalism that prevented the activity of the Holy Spirit. Even Nicodemus did not know of the new birth. Jesus' work was far more hampered by these self-styled teachers of the Jewish faith that it was by those who made no profession of religion.

If we can imagine the danger to a flock of sheep from a wolf that has on its back the wool of a sheep and imitates the voice of a sheep, we have an idea of the harm that was being done to the most of the Jews by their leaders who were actuated by the mercenary mind and were lacking in a spiritual understanding of the revelation God had made. How unwilling they were to accept the will of God can be seen in their eagerness to put Christ, the Son of God, to death.

While it is not a simple matter to detect a false teacher offhand, Jesus tells His hearers that teachers are to be judged by their fruit, just as a tree is to be judged. The fruit a tree produces is true to its kind. The same is to be said of a religious teacher. What of his character and conduct? Does he show the fruits of the Spirit in his life?

One writer says that, "Even to the very gates of the kingdom will some come who will not be given a place in it." They will cry, "Lord, Lord," and produce the evidence of some good deeds they have performed; but since they rejected Jesus and failed to bring their lives into harmony with the will of the Father, they are cast out.

TWO FOUNDATIONS

Sometimes Jesus introduced His teaching with a parable; sometimes He threw a parable into the midst of it; and sometimes He concluded it with a parable. Here we have an illustration of the last method. And what a telling parable it is!

He said many things in this sermon, but all of them are very definitely related to the kingdom of God. It is possible to see a thread running through them all. And as He prepared to send the people away, the question arose in His mind, "What will they do with what I have told them? Is there any way of impressing on them more deeply these sayings of mine?"

Hence the parable. It is not a summary of what He had taught. It is an appeal that they should make the right use of what He had taught. Some of them would. They would heed His sayings, accept them as coming from the Father, and begin at once to live by them. Others would act differently. The seed had fallen on hard ground. They were pleased while He was speaking, but there it ended. They would return home without making any change in their faith or life.

In the land of our Lord streams are swollen quickly by the rains and become dangerous, destroying orchards, and gardens and lifting houses from their foundations. The wise man in building would prepare for such emergencies; the foolish man would exercise no such forethought. The acceptance of Jesus and His teachings prepares one for whatever may come. But he who builds on the foundation of self-righteousness and false teaching does it to his own destruction.

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

THE UNCHANGING TRUTH

What do we have in these verses but a first century message for twentieth century people? Jesus was not teaching for His day alone. He had His eye on the unborn centuries. He was laying down principles for the guidance of life in all ages and in all lands. The symbolism and the parables belonged to His own times and country in a special sense. Every word in these verses falls on our hearts with the same weight and appropriateness as in the day He spoke them. Therefore let us take nothing from them, or apologize for them, or explain them

away. We have precisely the same conditions confronting us that He faced.

OUR UNPAID DEBT TO OTHERS

"The world owes me a living." How often we have heard that said! Perhaps we have felt the same way ourselves. But let us start at the other end and ask ourselves what we owe the world. That surely is the Christian way of approach. Jesus says we are to do to others what we would like to have them do unto us. And the clear implication is we are to proceed immediately with that program. We are not to wait to see who the people are who render us a useful and pleasing service. No special grace is called for to render good for good. But to be helpful to others before they have been helpful to us, and to be kind to them when they have been unkind to us, does call for something beyond what mere human nature is able to render. When Mr. McKinley was assassinated in Buffalo he requested that the assassin be not harmed. Was that a proper desire to which to give expression? Compare it with the saying of Stephen at his martyrdom, and the words of Jesus on the cross. The mind to do good under all circumstances is the mind of Christ.

THE TREE AND ITS FRUIT

It was an exceedingly hot day in mid-summer. Dinner was over, and we were taking a little rest under the shade of a tree before going out to the field to continue our work. We saw a man coming down the road, carrying bundles. He turned in our way. His business was taking orders for fruit trees. We were interested, for some of our trees had died and we wanted others to put in their places. He had no trees with him, but he had books in which were the pictures of the fruit that was supposed to grow on the trees he was anxious to sell my father. He also had samples of the fruit canned. We were pleased with it, and felt that if we could grow apples, peaches and pears as beautiful as the samples we would be satisfied. The bargain was closed. In due time the trees came and were planted. When they began to produce fruit it had no resemblance to what we had seen in the picture book and in the jar. What he had done was to try to make us believe that perfect fruit can grow on imperfect trees. It cannot be done. The fruit declares the nature of the tree.

BEWARE OF FALSE TEACHERS

A preliminary word should be said about the way we judge others. It is doubtful if there is any group of Christian people who would be bold enough to claim that the truth as they hold and teach it is absolutely without any admixture of evil. That would be a rather risky position to take, and one might lay himself open to ridicule. And we may just as well say that Jesus was not speaking of men who were either perfect in their own lives, or perfect in their apprehension of the truth.

Well, whom had He in mind? I think He had reference to those

who were false teachers and knew at the time they were false teachers. They were hypocrites and frauds. They deliberately set about to mislead the people and to gain certain advantage thereby. If we read in other parts of the gospels what Jesus had to say of this class of persons we shall be convinced He was thinking of those who for personal advancement were teaching error.

Let it not be inferred from what has been said that sincerity is all that is necessary. A man may be sincere and dead wrong at the same time. We must square our teachings with the Bible. Is what you and I are presenting to others in harmony with the Word of God? There is a way by which we may know that we are handling the very truth of God. The Scriptures are our infallible guide.

THE FOUNDATION THAT IS LAID

We are building. We are laying a foundation, or rather choosing a foundation that is already laid. No one will question the importance of starting right. Paul writes, "For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." That is, no man can lay any other foundation if he hopes to build securely. Yes, there are other foundations, such as good works, self-righteousness, and "God is too good to punish the wicked." But if we want to build for the present and the future in a way that will prevent us from suffering loss, there is only one method, and that is to hear the sayings of Jesus and do them.

CUTTING DOWN THE CORRUPT TREE

We are asked to make this a temperance lesson, and to help to lay the sharp ax at the root of the liquor traffic. Most of us are old enough to remember the open saloon. And we are old enough, too, to remember some of its fruits. They were like thorns and thistles. If we were to judge that institution by what it produced in the way of poverty, misery, crime, broken homes, sadness of heart, we would say, "Cut it down, for it curses the ground on which it stands." And the result of the traffic, whether it be carried on one way or another, is the same. Everywhere it lays its hand it blights what it touches. We speak of war, pestilence and famine; but none of them can equal in desolation the tragic story of the liquor traffic.

But whether we have this particular evil in mind or some other, the remedy is the same. Let us preach and teach Christ. Let us scatter His sayings like good seed over the whole earth.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

Make a list of the miracles of healing Jesus effected in chapters 9 and 10. In what respects are they the same? In what respects are they different? Did the Old Testament look for a Messiah who would be endowed with the powers of healing? In what ways do you think the healing ministry of Jesus is carried on today? Are you prepared to say that He does not effect any cures at the present time except through means?

SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 8:1—9:34. (Print 9:1-13.)
(American Standard Revision Text)

1. And he entered into a boat, and crossed over, and came into his own city.

2. And behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven.

3. And behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth.

4. And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts?

5. For which is easier, to say, Thy sins are forgiven; or to say, Arise, and walk?

6. But that ye may know that the Son of man hath authority on earth to forgive sins (then saith he to the sick of the palsy), Arise, and take up thy bed, and go unto thy house.

7. And he arose, and departed to his house.

8. But when the multitudes saw it, they were afraid, and glorified God, who had given such authority unto men.

9. And as Jesus passed by from thence, he saw a man, called Matthew, sitting at the place of toll: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him.

10. And it came to pass, as he sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with Jesus and his disciples.

11. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Teacher with the publicans and sinners?

12. But when he heard it, he said, They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick.

13. But go ye and learn what *this* meaneth, I desire mercy, and not sacrifice: for I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.

GOLDEN TEXT: Himself took our infirmities, and bare our diseases.—Matthew 8:17.

LESSON GOAL: To learn that along with His preaching and teaching Jesus gave much time to healing the sick and comforting the sorrowful, and that He would have those who bear His name cultivate the feeling of true sympathy toward the unfortunate.

LESSON PLAN

I. MANY MIRACLES (8:1-34; 9:18-34).

II. THE POWER TO FORGIVE SINS (9:1, 2).

III. THE POWER TO HEAL THE BODY (9:3-8).

IV. A DISCIPLE CALLED (9:9).

V. A FEAST OF HONOR (9:10-13).

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

Verse 2: *They brought to him a man sick of the palsy.*—Mark tells us the sick man was let down through the roof. Because of the outside stairway the roof of most Oriental houses is easily reached. The roof of most of the houses, except those which are arched or domed, is constructed first of poles which are placed close together. On these heavy poles stone slabs are placed, and these covered with a layer of hard-rolled earth. The friends of the sick man had to dig through the earth, remove one of the slabs and part the heavy poles.

Verse 6: *Take up thy bed.*—While wealthy Palestinians had cotton-filled mattresses which were stored in an alcove during the day and thrown down at night on the floor or on an elevated divan, the majority

of the people had only a blanket, rug, or perhaps an outer garment which could easily be rolled up and carried.

Verse 9: *Sitting at the place of toll.*—The place of toll where Matthew sat may have been by the lake, since there was a duty imposed by the Romans on fishing and on the lake trade. In truth, almost everything was taxed. Or it may have been on the outskirts of the town where toll was collected from merchants traversing the great Roman road extending from Damascus to Egypt, and passing by Capernaum.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

In the main, the material to be found in Matthew's Gospel is chronologically arranged. Still, every student knows that he follows the topical method also. For instance, we have in our lesson today at least ten miracles. Mark and Luke do not place them together as does Matthew. They seem to locate them more nearly at the time of their occurrence. But Matthew found his purpose better served by bringing them together so that they would have a cumulative effect on the reader, just as he does the seven parables in the thirteenth chapter of his gospel.

Still, we are reasonably sure that most of the miracles we look at in this lesson were performed in the early portion of the Galilean ministry, or early in A. D. 28. With a greater degree of confidence we can say that with two or three exceptions they were performed in the city of Capernaum, where our Lord had taken up His home.

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

MIRACLES OF HEALING

Under the title, "Miracles of Healing," we shall have to include all those mighty works of power in these two chapters outside the print passage. It must suffice that we look at the variety of them.

The first is the case of a Jew who had leprosy, and for that reason was unclean, and ostracised from society (8: 1-4). Having heard of the power of Jesus to heal he believes that He can cure him of this foul disease if He will. Our Lord does not shrink from the ceremonial uncleanness that resulted from coming into contact with the dread disease. He touches the leper, and speaks the word that cleanses him; but in order that the law of Moses might be fulfilled and the healed man restored to the community he is told to report to the priest.

The second is the case of a centurion, a Gentile, whose servant is ill (8: 5-13). His understanding of the supernatural power, the healing sympathy and the love of Jesus is unique. He believes that the miracle-worker can bring His power into play just as easily as he himself can control the actions of those under his authority. His humble spirit, his trustful confidence, and his firm faith please Jesus.

The third cure leads Jesus into the bosom of the family of one of His dearest friends (8: 14-17). It is Peter's wife's mother who is sick of a fever. In some cases Jesus seems to have healed by word alone, sometimes by touch alone, and again by both. The keen personal interest of Jesus was manifested in every case.

The fourth is an instance of His power over the forces of nature (8: 23-27). The sea is being lashed by the winds as they rush down from the surrounding hills, and the little boat is tossed by the waves. The entire account implies that if the disciples had been as trustful as they

might have been, seeing they were the children of the heavenly Father, a miracle would not have been necessary. The self-composure of the Saviour and His control of wind and sea teach the disciples an important lesson.

The fifth case cites the conflict of Jesus with the soul-destroying powers of darkness (8: 28-34). Here is the battleground between good and evil. Jesus does not enter it unwillingly. The insolence of the demons is evident. The fray is on. The result is the release of several human wrecks from the control of fallen spirits. Of all His miracles this kind must have pleased our Lord best. The tenth miracle belongs here too. (9: 32-34.)

The seventh and eighth miracles are interwoven (9: 18-26). The visit of a ruler of a synagogue, Jairus by name, to Jesus in behalf of his dying daughter, is the case of a father throwing prejudice to the wind and seeking help of Jesus toward whom he evidently had not been too friendly. Jesus responded at the first call, but on the way was interrupted by a woman whose plague had been of long standing. Feeling virtue go out of Him He turned and faced the woman who had touched His garment, and who believed that a mere touch would effect a cure. He was pleased with her faith and rewarded her with kindly words. Continuing His journey He was soon at the home of Jairus. The little daughter was now dead, but her fair spirit had not gone beyond His recall. Clearing the room of hired mourners He took her by the hand and she arose.

The ninth miracle is the restoration of sight to two blind men (9: 27-31). Here Jesus seems to object to that type of fame which regarded Him as chiefly a miracle-worker. Notice that He does not cure them along the way, but waits until He gets in the house, so that a degree of privacy might attend the cure. Further, their faith does not appear to be that spontaneous and firm kind which actuated some of the suppliants for help in the preceding miracles. Jesus catechises them first. His request for secrecy goes unheeded.

POWER TO FORGIVE SINS

We come back now to the sixth miracle in the series, which we are to study more carefully. Jesus returned "to his own city," Capernaum. If it was with the hope of seeking privacy He failed. He had scarcely entered His own house, or Peter's, before it was noised abroad that He was there. One of the first visitors He had was a paralytic who was carried into His presence on a pallet by four friends. The crowd of people necessitated the emergency method of mounting the outer stairs and breaking a hole through the roof, by means of which the sufferer was lowered into the presence of Jesus. Contrary to our Lord's usual custom He deferred the physical cure until He had dealt with the man's sins.

While Jesus discountenanced the practice of tracing physical infirmities to sins, it is very evident that He thought of sin and suffering as being closely connected. They are both foreign to His kingdom. It is

not necessary to infer from the order of events here that the sin of this man or his parents had brought paralysis on him. Perhaps his affliction did bring him to a consciousness of sin, and Jesus seeing this spoke first the word of forgiveness.

THE POWER TO HEAL THE BODY

Man wants to see before he will believe. Because Jesus' critics could not see that the man's sins were forgiven at the spoken word of Him who has power to forgive sin, they declared that He was guilty of blasphemy. They charged that He usurped the prerogative of God. It is true they did not speak out, but Christ, by their looks, gestures, and inward feelings, was able to read what was passing through their minds. The next step was to give these men an ocular demonstration of His superhuman power. Both to forgive and to heal are outside the ability of man; but both are within the ability of Jesus. Therefore to the unprejudiced mind they are alike proof of the claim of Jesus that He is the Messiah. With the same word that forgave the man's sins his body was made well and strong, so that he was able to take up his bed and pass out through the crowd. Whether they were willing to admit His right to forgive sins or not, the whole multitude were amazed at what they had seen and heard.

A DISCIPLE CALLED

Matthew, whose name formerly had been Levi, resided in or near Capernaum. He was a tax collector, and the place of toll was in that city. Because of his profession he was hated by the Jews. There can be little doubt that He had heard Jesus before this particular call came to him, and it may even be that he was already a disciple, or believer. He was sitting at the toll-booth collecting taxes when Jesus passed by and called him to follow Him. His modesty forbids him informing us in his own record how much he forsook to answer that call. But Luke tells us "he forsook all." It may have seemed to some that Jesus jeopardized the highest interest of His kingdom by calling a man to apostleship whose former occupation was a reproach.

A FEAST OF HONOR

In order fittingly to signalize the change in his profession, Matthew made a feast. It seems to have been intended to bid farewell to his old friends and to do honor to his new Master. He had no intention of keeping this particular placement of his affection and loyalty a secret. He was anxious to have every one know that he had become a follower of the Lord Jesus.

It was to be expected that the strict Jews, who refused to eat with publicans and would not recognize them in society, would hurl their sharpest criticisms at Jesus for mingling in such company. On no other occasion did they more completely misinterpret the inner purpose of His mission. He was content with the reply that it is the sick who have need of a physician.

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

THE SUFFICIENT CHRIST

No teacher will attempt to give an exposition of all the miracles Matthew sets down in these two chapters. And yet every teacher ought to direct attention to the variety of physical needs Jesus met in these cures. There were no two of them alike, and still every condition they represent impresses upon us how man must wait on the life-giving Lord for the satisfying of his deepest needs. Each one, borne down by some affliction, pushed off the highway of activity as a piece of human wreckage, kept scanning the horizon for the appearance of a friend who could make him whole and set him again at useful tasks. If Jesus deals with us differently it is probably because our needs are different, and we have our individual lessons to learn. But let us pause long enough to say that He is the very Friend we need whatever our state may be.

THE ILLUSION OF THE SPECTACULAR

Man has always been attracted by what he can see with his two eyes. He is impressed by appearances. There is nothing particularly strange about that. He depends on his organs of sight for much of his knowledge. He says seeing is believing. But the trouble is that often his logic leads him to add that what he cannot see is to be doubted. It happened in those early days just as it happens now, that Jesus was accepted or rejected, hated or loved, chiefly in terms of material good. In proportion as He was generous with the gifts of health, of food, of outward comforts was He acclaimed King by hosts of people. By His frequent withdrawal from the public eye He let it be understood that He was more than a miracle-worker. He could multiply loaves and fishes, and heal the blind, and cleanse the leper, and restore the paralytic; but suppose His work had ended there, what would have been accomplished?

SIN AND SUFFERING JOINED

Our readers will concur in what has been said above. At the same time our lesson is a study of "Jesus Healing and Helping," and we do not want to minimize its importance. In "A New Commentary on Holy Scripture," published by *The Macmillan Company*, are to be found these words: "Two points must be observed for the understanding of our Lord's words: (1) Sin and suffering are regarded as closely connected; (2) the coming of the kingdom, which the Lord proclaims, is to banish both. The Lord's healing miracles are the signs of the kingdom, the first drops of the coming torrent of blessing. If He brings the blessings of the kingdom for the body, He can bring them for the soul also."

If, then, sin and suffering are closely connected, as they undoubtedly are, how can Jesus deal with the one without dealing with the other? Both are inconsistent with the kingdom in its perfected form. As the knowledge of the Lord advances and His will comes to be more fully observed sickness and suffering will be banished.

THE SYMPATHY THAT HELPS

It can be said that Jesus was never indifferent toward those in need. He was the soul of compassion. We read here and there of His being moved with compassion. Now the will to help must be present first. The ability to succor others will never be drawn upon until men can weep with them that weep. The attitude of the Saviour toward men, women and children with broken bodies is one of the tenderest chapters in all His earthly career. He was more quickly drawn aside by such cases of need than by any other single thing. He would leave His teaching, and walk right out from the midst of a crowd that was hanging on His words, in order to relieve suffering and to comfort the broken-hearted.

CATCHING THE CHRIST SPIRIT

The desire of the Church to recover more of the healing ministry which had so large a place in the work of Jesus is a step in the right direction. We are not thereby necessarily expecting a repetition of the miracles which He performed in His day. There are other methods of bringing about essentially the same results. The point is that the work of caring for the bodies of men must rest heavily on the heart of the Church. Jesus is not less compassionate toward the unfortunate today than He was nineteen hundred years ago. If His disciples hope to represent Him in the world they must see in the bodies of men broken by sin, overtaken by disease, and wasted by age, opportunities for a service that falls in line with what engaged so much of the Master's time.

GOING DEEPER

It is good to be living today. Never before have there been so many institutions of mercy. The child that is born these days seems to have the care of a whole civilization thrown around him. His chances to grow up well, and to have a strong body, and to be equipped to be useful in the world, were never so bright as now.

But we dare not stop there. We cannot remove the effect without dealing with the cause. Again we would be reminded that sin and suffering are closely connected. We must guide the lives entrusted to us in the ways of righteous living. Never so long as we live shall we be able to release ourselves from the consequences of wrongdoing without choosing the way that is true, and pure, and honest, and of good report. Jesus not only said, "Be healed of thine infirmity," He also said, "Go, sin no more."

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

What impressed upon Jesus the sense of need for additional workers? What did He mean when He said that the harvest indeed is plenteous? What was the one condition He laid down for securing laborers?

What authority did He give the twelve He chose? What were some of the rules they were to observe as they went about their work?

Consider before coming to your class some of the fields into which full-time workers are being called today. Has your church sent out a minister or a missionary?

SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 9:35—11:1. (Print 9:35—10:8; 10:40-42.)
(American Standard Revision Text)

9:35. And Jesus went about all the cities and the villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of disease and all manner of sickness.

36. But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion for them, because they were distressed and scattered, as sheep not having a shepherd.

37. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest indeed is plenteous, but the laborers are few.

38. ~~Pray~~ ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he send forth laborers into his harvest.

10:1. And he called unto him his twelve disciples, and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of disease and all manner of sickness.

2. Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; 3 Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the

publican; James the son of Alphæus, and Thaddæus; 4 Simon the Cananean, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.

5. These twelve Jesus sent forth, and charged them, saying, Go not into *any* way of the Gentiles, and enter not into any city of the Samaritans:

6. but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

7. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.

8. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons: freely ye received, freely give.

10:40. He that receiveth you receiveth me and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.

41. He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward: and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward.

42. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you he shall in no wise lose his reward.

GOLDEN TEXT: The harvest indeed is plenteous, but the laborers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he send forth laborers into his harvest.—Matthew 9:37, 38.

LESSON GOAL: To discover the need of workers in Christ's kingdom, and to realize there is a place of service for each of us.

LESSON PLAN

I. NEEDING LABORERS (9:35-38).

1. Reaching the Field.
2. Getting Workers.
3. Training Workers.

II. CHOOSING LABORERS (10:1-4).

1. The Number.
2. The Variety.

III. COMMISSIONING LABORERS (10:5-10).

1. The Field.
2. The Message.
3. The Work.
4. The Wages.

IV. RULES GOVERNING LABORERS (10:11—11:1).

1. In the Home.
2. Before Councils.
3. Be Not Fearful.
4. Joined to Christ.

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

9: 35: *Teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom.*—The congregation, having washed their hands outside the synagogue, and, being assembled, delegated one of their number to conduct public worship. This leader arrayed in his fringed garment with the phylacteries on his head and left arm, began with the reading of a prayer, the people responding to certain parts. After the prayer came the reading of the Scriptures from the scroll of the law brought from a chest by the minister of the synagogue. After the reading of the Scriptures the oral discourse followed. Much freedom was permitted in this, since any priest, elder or other person having an understanding of the Scriptures had liberty to speak. Strangers of distinction were also invited to address the congregation.

10: 14: *Shake off the dust of your feet.*—This was a symbolical way of showing that those who rejected the Gospel were held in contempt and regarded on a level with the Gentiles, whose very dust was defiling.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

We know that right after His baptism and temptation Jesus began calling men to follow Him. He realized from the beginning that part of His task was the training of men into whose hands He could place the responsibilities of the kingdom when His earthly labor was ended. These men were with Him more or less, helping Him, learning of Him, getting ready for the larger duties, months before they were chosen as apostles.

Again it is necessary for us to take account of the fact that the materials in the gospels are not always arranged in the order of the events they describe. Matthew, for instance, places the choosing and commissioning of the twelve after the sermon on the mount; while Luke reverses that order, and Luke is probably right (Luke 6: 12-26). Mark seems to agree with Luke (Mark 3: 13-19). Placing the three accounts together we find that Jesus went up into a mountain, no doubt in the neighborhood of the Horns of Hattin, where He spent all the night in prayer. The next morning He chose the twelve and named them apostles, and then followed the sermon on the mount. These events took place in the summer of 28 A. D.

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

NEEDING LABORERS

Jesus saw what a rich field He had among the Galileans. He made extensive tours, visiting the towns and villages throughout that region. Everywhere He was greeted with throngs of people. When He saw them following Him and showing a deep spiritual interest in the message He preached, His heart was deeply moved with compassion toward them. He was unable to care for them all in such a way as to meet their heart hungering.

It was this condition that led Him to look among these crowds for certain men who might be associated with Him as His intimate companions and constant co-laborers (9: 35-38). Since those He chose had already been following Him for some time He could at once start laying a few responsibilities on their shoulders. The tours of Jesus revealed to Him how distressed and scattered, how "down and out," the people were for want of real spiritual leadership.

Before calling the disciples to share His labors in the fullest sense,

He set before them a picture of the conditions as they really were. He said, "The harvest indeed is plenteous." There was much work to be done. The people were ready to be gathered into the kingdom. It could be seen how eager they were for the Gospel. The results already were surprisingly large.

The other fact He noted was the scarcity of laborers. The leaders the people had when He came were no leaders at all. The scribes and Pharisees were blind leaders of the blind. If the men He should choose spent some time in His company they could become mighty preachers and soul-winners. He wanted them to think of the claim the needy field had on them. And, furthermore, they were to pray that men, the proper men, might respond to the call to service.

CHOOSING LABORERS

"The selection by Jesus of the twelve from the band of disciples who had gradually gathered around His person is an important landmark in the Gospel history. It divides the ministry of our Lord into two portions, nearly equal, probably, as to duration, but unequal as to extent and importance of the work done in each respectively. In the earlier period Jesus labored single-handed; His miraculous deeds were confined for the most part to a limited area, and His teaching was in the main of an elementary character. But by the time the twelve were chosen, the work of the kingdom had assumed such dimensions as to require organization and division of labor; and the teaching of Jesus was beginning to be of a deeper and more elaborate nature, and His gracious activities were taking on ever-widening range."—*The Training of the Twelve by Bruce.*

It is useless to speculate as to why Jesus chose twelve men, no less and no more. Of course there had been twelve tribes of Israel. That may have had something to do with it. He endeavored, we know, to link up His kingdom with the Old Testament dispensation. It certainly was not limited to twelve because He could find no more who were equal to the task, for a little later he found seventy to send out.

It goes without saying that the twelve He chose were as different as they could be in manner, habits, talents and temper. Some were better leaders, while others were better followers. When grouped they represented a force that Jesus could profitably use for the highest ends of His kingdom. Concerning a number of them very little is told us in the New Testament; but enough is said to lead us to believe that they represented all types of men. They were from the humbler walks of life; but they were all intelligent and hard-working men. They enjoyed the capacity of spiritual perception, and gave evidence of being devoted to Jesus.

But what constituted them apostles? What had they now that was not theirs before? In the first place they were to be with Him constantly. In the second place He gave them authority over unclean spirits, and disease and sickness. In the third place they were to be His authorized representatives and ambassadors. In the fourth place to them would be entrusted this work when He left the earth.

COMMISSIONING LABORERS

The field of these twelve workers was to be the lost sheep of the house of Israel, the Jews. It is not strange that Jesus limited their work for the present to their own race. It would be time enough a little later to remove the barriers and send them into all the world. It was natural and logical that they should go first to the people who had been trained through all their history to look for the coming of the Messiah. It was from them that He would have to get His earliest messengers.

The message they were to preach was the Gospel. They were to proclaim the kingdom of heaven at hand. That was what the Baptist and Jesus preached. A new day had arrived. Old things were passing away, and new things were being ushered in. God had come down to visit His people. The Messiah, the Son of God, was walking in their midst. The long-looked-for time had arrived when promise and prophecy would be fulfilled in the establishment of the spiritual reign of God upon the earth.

The work they were to do was a merciful one. They were to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons, as evidence of their authority; but more, as proof of the power and sympathy of their Lord. Their preaching would be all the more effective if it were accompanied by works of grace and helpfulness.

And what wages were these men to receive? Answer: their board. They were not to take more with them than they actually needed. The hospitality of the East would assure them shelter and food. They were not to give the impression that they would be materially advantaged personally by this preaching. What they were told to do was worth money, and more than money could purchase; but it was to be freely bestowed. They were not money-making itinerants.

RULES GOVERNING LABORERS

Verses 11-15: *In the home*.—Not all homes would be hospitably opened to the messengers of Christ. Some that would be opened would not prove worthy. The apostles would need hosts who would be sympathetic with their work. The hosts in these homes were to receive a blessing; while those who would prove unworthy were to be summarily abandoned, and the proffered blessing withdrawn. The rejection of Jesus was a serious matter.

Verses 16-23: *Before Councils*.—The apostles were to meet organized opposition. The Jewish authorities had the right to arrest and punish the heralds of Jesus, according to their laws and customs. But had they been wise and spiritually-minded they would have acknowledged the rights of these men. Jesus foresaw what would happen, but He told them they would not be left alone when they were on trial.

Verses 24-39: *Be not fearful*.—The apostles were to expect persecution. They were not above their Lord. But when persecuted they were not to fear. Their essential being could not be harmed, even though the body be destroyed. And they were in God's care. He would look after them.

Verses 40-42: *Joined to Christ*.—Of such dignity did Jesus conceive the apostles that any attitude men took toward them would reveal their attitude toward Him. This principle is correct if the only way Jesus has of making His will known is through His representatives. The apostles were the channels through which Jesus came into men's hearts.

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

THE NEEDS OF THE FIELD

It can hardly be said that the need of the world for Christ and His Gospel is any less today than it was when He was on the earth. We are wont to speak of this country as a Christian nation, and yet there is scarcely a city or rural community of which it can not truthfully be said, "The harvest indeed is plenteous." Our own denomination, for instance, could locate profitably hundreds of missions without encroaching on any other field if we had the men and the means. Now what may be said of the foreign field? One-third of the human race has not yet heard of Jesus Christ. That in itself is a tremendous challenge. In most of the so-called non-Christian countries into which the Church has entered, the converts we have made are a mere handful in comparison with the population. The picture Jesus beheld of people distressed and scattered is still a reality.

SPECIAL HELPERS

There is a sense in which we may speak of the sacredness of all worth-while tasks, and we have the authority of Jesus for that statement. But that is not the specific teaching of this lesson. He needs men and women, and He needed them from the very beginning, who are willing to give themselves—time, thought, strength, money—to nothing else but the kingdom enterprise. This work calls for leadership, consecration, single-mindedness, initiative, self-denial, vision, and anything else that has to be placed back of and invested in a worldly project that we hope will be a success. If there are no laborers to be sent forth there will be no harvest gathered. Some congregations that have never in a long history sent a young man into the ministry want the best preacher for their pastor.

A DIVISION OF RESPONSIBILITIES

Shortly after Mr. Coolidge retired from the presidency, he said that he made it a rule during his term of office never to do what he could get some one else to do, and that he attributed much of the success of his administration to that fact. He further said that for many of the tasks for which he felt responsible he could find men better fitted than himself. The principle of distributing work is sound. It cannot be said too often that to set ten men to work is far better than doing the work of ten men. Don't be jealous of your job. See that other hands are kept busy.

AS YE GO PREACH

These words of Jesus may be applied to the rest of us as well as to preachers. *What shall we preach?* Briefly we are to tell the good news

of salvation. The message has not been changed since our Lord was here. It is that same story men need today. We may put it in many different forms, but the heart of them all is the same. *When* shall we preach? Whenever we have opportunity. It may be on Sunday or any other day. The best time is liable to break on us any minute. That is why we must always be ready. To speak the word at the right time means much. *Where* shall we preach? There are other places than the pulpit. The office, the shop, the social room, may afford us very unique places. We may find the holy spot anywhere along the way in a whole day's journey.

WHAT DO WE GET OUT OF IT

The person who is in the King's business must be careful lest he should seem to be actuated by mercenary motives. Jesus was particular to caution His disciples against worldly show and ends. They were not to take much with them. Simplicity was to mark their habits. They were not to be anxious as to what they received along the way. If they put material gain first they could not possibly be of much use to the kingdom of God. He did not choose them to be rich in this world's goods; He chose them that they might be rich in faith and good works.

FREELY GIVE

Christ had given all He had to these men. There was no reason why they should regard even kings with envy. Having received much they were to give freely. It had not been bestowed on them to keep. It would be a blessing to them only as they gave it away.

In Connecticut there lived a lady who had a beautiful flower garden, in which she took great pride. The whole country was proud of it, too, and people drove miles to see it. Most unselfish in her love for flowers, she gave away enormous quantities. Two large baskets were fastened by the side of her gate, and these were filled every morning with cut flowers, to which passers-by were invited to help themselves. School children, business men, tramps, alike blessed the good lady's kindness. "You cut such quantities," one said to her. "Aren't you afraid you will rob yourself?"

"The more I cut the more I have," she answered. "Don't you know that if plants are allowed to go to seed they stop blooming?"

The beauty goes out of the Christian life that is not full of good works and almsdeeds. The soul loses its fragrance when the hand is restrained from giving.—*The Heidelberg Teacher*.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

Who had been the forerunner of Jesus? What was the reason for his being cast into prison? So far as you know had he ever questioned the messiahship of Jesus before? As you read the record, do you think he raised the question at this time because he was despondent, or because he was somewhat disappointed in the way Jesus was carrying on His work? What answer did Jesus send to John? And what was His estimate of him?

What did our Lord mean by "the wise and understanding"? And how are we to interpret the use of the word "babes" here? How alone can we know the Father as we should? What are some of the blessings we receive through Jesus Christ?

QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 11:2—12:50. (Print 11:2-6, 25-30.)
(American Standard Revision Text)

11:2. Now when John heard in the prison the works of the Christ, he sent by his disciples

3. and said unto him, Art thou he that cometh, or look we for another?

4 And Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and tell John the things which ye hear and see:

5. the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good tidings preached to them.

6. And blessed is he, whosoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me.

25. At that season Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou didst hide these things from the wise and

understanding, and didst reveal them unto babes:

26. yea, Father, for so it was well-pleasing in thy sight.

27. All things have been delivered unto me of my Father: and no one knoweth the Son, save the Father; neither doth any know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal *him*.

28. Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

29. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

30. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

GOLDEN TEXT: Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.—Matthew 11:28.

LESSON GOAL: To learn Jesus' testimony concerning Himself.

LESSON PLAN

I. JESUS ANSWERS JOHN'S DISCIPLES (11:1-19).

II. JESUS DENOUNCES HIS REJECTORS (20-24).

III. JESUS SPEAKS TO GOD AND MEN (25-30).

IV. JESUS CURES ON THE SABBATH (12:1-21).

V. JESUS ANSWERS HIS FOES (22-50).

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

Verse 3: *He that cometh*.—This harks back to prophecy. "The prophecy of Moses in Deut. 18:15, which referred to Christ, had led the people generally to expect the appearance of a prophet clothed with unusual authority." John had announced Jesus as the "coming One." This expression has much to do with understanding the relation of the two testaments.

Verse 25: *Wise and understanding*.—This refers to the scribes and Pharisees, who boasted of their learning and held others in contempt. Jesus did not exalt ignorance by this statement; He meant that "the secrets of the kingdom are revealed to those who have the meekness of infants and the child-like eagerness for knowledge."

Verse 30: *My yoke . . . my burden*.—"In allusion to the instruments by which animals were attached to the plough or cart." Yokes were made to fit each animal that wore it, so as to prevent galling and make its pulling as easy as possible. Burdens were usually carried on

the head; when too heavy the carrier was soon fatigued and likely to fall under the load.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

The injunctions have been given privately to the Twelve and Jesus is now free to resume His public ministry. We have now, for the first time in this gospel, an account in some detail of the teaching Jesus had to give to the crowds. Hitherto His lessons have been intended for His own disciples, except where they have arisen directly out of one of His miracles. Now He speaks to all men, and it is clear that this direct contact will at once produce conflict. The reaction of the Jewish nation as a whole to Jesus was hostile, and one task of the evangelist was to show how this came about.—*T. H. Robinson, D.D.*

The rejection of Jesus began to be public. The question of John, the woe on the rejecting cities and the open attacks of the scribes and Pharisees are related by Matthew to indicate the attitude Jesus met.

John the Baptist was imprisoned in the dungeon under the royal palace, which Herod Antipas had rebuilt at Machaerus. It was a strong fortress in Perea, about five miles east of the northern end of the Dead Sea. No stronger citadel existed outside of Jerusalem. The ruins of the fortress are still to be seen.

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

JESUS ANSWERS JOHN'S DISCIPLES

Matthew 11: 1-19. John's preaching had ended disastrously for him. He was a prisoner, not for criminal actions, but for exposing sins. His imprisonment had continued probably about a year. Jesus had concluded His instructions to the twelve and dismissed them on their mission, while He kept on at His work. Reports of what Jesus was doing were carried to John by his disciples, who had liberty to come and go.

John was not at ease because of these reports. He began to wonder. He either doubted the fact that Jesus was the Messiah, as he had announced Him, or he was disappointed in the manner in which Jesus was demonstrating His Messiahship. John had predicted Jesus as a reformer whose drastic means would overthrow evils and as the Lamb of God, a sacrificial offering to God. The reports did not indicate that Jesus was doing either. His message was a gracious one about God's love. He was gaining popularity. John expected something different. Besides John may have feared that his own disciples would begin to doubt him, if Jesus did not soon do some of the things John had announced. John may have planned that "he would press Him into greater publicity and urge Him to demonstrate in some striking way, perhaps by liberating himself, that He was the 'mightier' of his own message." Then, too, John may have felt that it was not fair for him to be a prisoner unjustly. So he sent two disciples to ask Jesus whether, or not, He was truly the Messiah, or were they, including Jesus, to keep on looking for the Coming One.

Jesus gave no direct answer; He made no appeal to Scriptures; He offered no argument. He worked on and asked John's messengers to observe and report. The report might surprise John, but it would satisfy him. His problem would be solved by hearing of these works of Jesus. The added beatitude was specially for John's encouragement.

But the multitude must not misunderstand John. Formerly they had flocked to hear him, an upstanding man, given to enduring hardship, and a prophet whose words they had heeded. John was not changed. He was unshaken and more than the ordinary prophet, for he was the herald of the Messiah, yet his relation was that of servant, while one who believes in Christ the Messiah is regarded as a son, thus greater before God than John.

The kingdom John announced was much desired and men strove to force their entrance into it. "Ever since the Baptist's days a revolutionary spirit had been abroad in the land, and Jewish patriots had been dreaming of a national deliverance and watching for an opportunity to achieve it." (*David Smith*). However, John was not the establisher of a kingdom but the herald of the King.

Jesus denounced the people for censuring John and Himself, and added the striking words about wisdom, meaning probably that "to such as were taught of God, John and our Lord alike had proved ministers of salvation."

JESUS DENOUNCES HIS REJECTORS

Verses 20-24.—This scathing denunciation and dreadful prediction fell on favored cities that had discredited His message and works. Even the despised Gentile cities would have done better under similar opportunities to receive Him.

JESUS SPEAKS TO GOD AND MEN

Verses 25-30.—In the midst of the disappointing treatment He was receiving, and the failure of mature leaders to understand Him, Jesus rises to great heights of undisturbed faith, as He thanks His Father that the humble were enabled to understand Him. With the Father, He, too, was pleased at this turn of affairs.

Thinking of these humbler ones, Jesus speaks words of assurance to them. They could trust Him for He was put in charge of everything by His Father and, if they desired access to the Father, to know Him, this would be possible through Jesus, for He could reveal the Father. Then with tenderness and encouragement He addressed those struggling under the burdens of "Pharisaical rules arbitrarily imposed," including doubtless every kind of toil and labor that try men's souls. He offers to be yoked with them, to share with them the toil and the weight. Though God's Son He is meek and lowly enough to come down to their level and give them the rest, spiritual and otherwise, not possible from any other source.

JESUS CURES ON THE SABBATH

Chapter 12: 1-21.—The uncompromising antagonism of the Pharisees to Jesus reached uncontrol in the accusations about disregard for the Sabbath. The Mosaic regulation had been loaded up with traditional

requirements, at least thirty-nine kinds of work being prohibited. The attack on Jesus because His disciples harvested and threshed grain, by plucking ears of wheat and rubbing grain from chaff with their hands, was bitter. Jesus met the attack with sarcastic conclusiveness. He appealed to David's deed and to their own practices, to upset their attack and belittle them.

Healing the withered hand on the Sabbath was used as a basis for questioning the right of such work on the sacred day. Jesus appealed again to ordinary customs and commonsense and silenced His accusers, but this did not lessen their determination to destroy Him. But their plans failed because Jesus went away.

JESUS ANSWERS HIS FOES

Verses 22-45.—Jesus' power to cast out demons was used by His foes as a ground for denouncing Him. They tried to link His work with Satan's power. This thoughtless remark of His foes opened the way for Him to expose their fallacious reasoning and to set before them the truth which cut them to the quick. He left no place for them to stand upon. He fearlessly classified them as being corrupt and sinful. He had as clear evidence of this as fruit on a tree or treasures in a man's house. Besides they would be held accountable before God for their idle words.

The willful unbelievers attempted to disprove His claims by demanding that He show them some sign in the heavens, by His miracle working power. This was a challenge to Him to prove that He was truly identified with God. His answer was direct, fearless, denouncing. He was not dealing in strange signs to prove anything. He did tell them that in their supposed righteousness they were opening the way for a worse state of wickedness than they had yet known.

The chapter closes with an announcement of the higher kinship to Jesus than that of human blood relationship. It would be an outcome of "whole-hearted adherence to the will of the Father in heaven."

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

TO THE RIGHT SOURCE

Who knows best about Jesus? Whose answers to questions about Him are best? His followers understand Him well; the Bible contains the record of His life. But, to be satisfied with Jesus, one must get into personal touch with Him. This was John's method. He went directly to the final authority about Jesus to have his doubts removed, his faith strengthened, his worries quieted. Jesus knows most about Himself, His mission, His doctrines and His deeds.

This is the normal course to follow. The botanist goes to the plants and flowers to learn their organism and habits. The ornithologist depends on first hand study of the birds; the entomologist studies bugs

and insects; the geologist studies the earth; the astronomer turns his telescope on the heavens. Men go directly to the things they want to understand for the source of sure information. The intimate companion of a king knows the king; the child at home knows his parents. To know the Bible we must read and study it. To know Jesus we must communicate directly with Him.

THE PROOF JESUS GIVES

Most people are more convinced by practice than theory. Reading a book about airplanes may leave us doubtful, but to hear one roar and see it soar into the heavens drives out doubt. We hear extravagant descriptions of some beauty spot of nature, but we must see it to know its charm. We treasure promises about investments and live on half hoping, half doubting, until dividends arrive and then we have material proof that we invested wisely.

Jesus was wise in His answer to John's messengers. He made no fine statement. He appealed to nothing for defense of His claim except what they could hear Him say to people and see Him do for them. This was ample proof. It was satisfying to John. It has given proof to faith in Jesus all through the ages. We must get back to that simple proof today. Speculation and argument will not establish Jesus in the hearts of men; they must have the proof of what He says and does and it must be a personally received proof.

SHALL WE STUMBLE?

Is Jesus a stumbling block? He certainly is and no wonder. He is so different that men stumble over His claims, His deeds, His offers, His record. Some are laughing at Him today, pointing out the uselessness of His mission, the folly of His teachings, the fancifulness of His cross. They stumble and go out of their way to cause others to stumble. What is wrong with these stumblers? Certainly the wrong is not in Jesus for millions are trudging, walking, running along with full confidence in Him without the slightest stumble.

John had some worries; he stumbled but not so as to fall. Even this Jesus would have us avoid. He promised a blessing on those who stumble not at all. Faith that goes along with Him, receiving direction from Him, being led by Him, rarely stumbles. When faith wavers the stumbling begins. Peter began to sink when he feared the storm. Judas fell when he bargained with Jesus' foes. They were both stumblers, and Judas was too far away to be lifted up. Shall we stumble?

RECEIVERS OF REVELATION

The thoughts of God, the intimate, deep, purposeful thoughts of God are outside the realm of mental discovery. Can man by searching find out God? Does the mind of man fathom the mysteries of the

infinite? Left unaided none could come to a knowledge of what God is and how He loves and how His providence operates. But these facts are known by us. We can think about them, converse with others about them, enrich our souls by what they furnish us. This has come about through revelation, which signifies that in His own way God has told His thoughts and plans to men. But the receivers of these greatest of thoughts are not a limited specialized class. Jesus was glad for this arrangement by God in which the receivers of revelation were those trustful, docile, tractable persons, who are not confident in their own wisdom. How comforting to us! We need not be famous for our learning before we can receive as our own the revelation of God.

THE SURE WAY TO TRUE REST

A wearied world in quest of rest, a Christian striving for peace, a religionist meticulously practicing all ritualistic ceremonies, needs to pause and listen to the paradoxical promises of Jesus. He offers rest. How strange this is! He puts himself up as a source of rest. He makes himself either ridiculous or resourceful. He either has or does not have power to provide what He promises. The test is in the use. What can be said about the results for them who have heeded His invitation? How many have found rest in Him? He bequeathed peace to disciples and the world; then why not accept His gift and cease striving, except to keep self free from the destroyers of spiritual peace. He put a meaning into religious ritual, frowning upon it as a letter to be obeyed and filling it with a spirit that vitalizes. But can He make good on His promises? He made a sweeping offer, apparently so large as to be glamorous, but whoever has accepted has found the sure way to true rest.

UNDER YOKE AND BURDEN

A transfer of yokes and the assumption of another burden—will that pay? This is Jesus' proposal. Everybody has yokes and burdens; it has always been so. Each one has a particular burden and is under a yoke best known to himself. What Jesus proposes is a shifting to another burden and a slipping to another yoke. What He adds is the appeal: an easier yoke, a lighter burden. What can He mean? For one thing He means that He makes and adjusts the yoke and works with us under it; for another He means that by sharing the burden with us He makes it lighter for us.

How can we have His yoke and burden? How can we move along happily thus tied and weighted? His presence helps, His example inspires prayer, meditation and working on,—these turn our thoughts from yokes and burdens.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

What is a parable? Why did Jesus use parables? Why did Matthew group so many of Jesus' parables together? Could the people understand the parable of the sower? How is its teaching illustrated in life today?

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 13:1-23. (Print verses 1-9, 18-23.)
(American Standard Revision Text)

1. On that day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side.

2. And there were gathered unto him great multitudes, so that he entered into a boat, and sat; and all the multitude stood on the beach.

3. And he spake to them many things in parables, saying, Behold, the sower went forth to sow;

4. and as he sowed, some *seeds* fell by the way side, and the birds came and devoured them:

5. and others fell upon the rocky places, where they had not much earth: and straightway they sprang up, because they had no deepness of earth:

6. and when the sun was risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away.

7. And others fell upon the thorns; and the thorns grew up and choked them:

8. and others fell upon the good ground, and yielded fruit, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

9. He that hath ears, let him hear.

18. Hear then ye the parable of the sower.

19. When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, *then* cometh the evil *one*, and snatcheth away that which hath been sown in his heart. This is he that was sown by the way side.

20. And he that was sown upon the rocky places, this is he that heareth the word, and straightway with joy receiveth it;

21. yet hath he not root in himself, but endureth for a while: and when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, straightway he stumbleth.

22. And he that was sown among the thorns, this is he that heareth the word; and the care of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.

23. And he that was sown upon the good ground, this is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; who verily beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

GOLDEN TEXT: He that hath ears, let him hear.—Matthew 13:9.

LESSON GOAL: To show that each one is responsible for the results of God's word in his life.

LESSON PLAN

I. THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER (1-9.)

1. The Trampled Soil.
2. The Thin Soil.
3. The Thorny Soil.
4. The True (Triumphant) Soil.

II. THE PURPOSE OF PARABLES (10-17).

1. An Answered Question.
2. An Added Beatitude.

III. THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER INTERPRETED (18-23).

1. The Indifferent Hearers.
2. The Superficial Hearers.
3. The Pre-occupied Hearers.
4. The Productive Hearers.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

The chapter presents seven parables relating to the kingdom of heaven. As in the other synoptists (Mark 4:1; Luke 8:5) the scene is the seaside. A boat drawn up in a narrow creek enabled the crowd to stand on either side, not far from the speaker.—*The New Century Bible*.

Of these seven parables "the first four were spoken from a boat on the Lake of Galilee; the last three to the disciples in a house." They were all probably spoken on the same day. The day has been called His "busy day."

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

Following the discouraging and distressing experience with foes, which had continued for some time, Jesus seems to have sought quiet by going to a house, probably in Capernaum, possibly in Bethsaida near by. It must have been toward evening, as it was on the same day of the events just recorded. Jesus went to the sea side, His disciples with him. He intended doubtless to talk with His disciples about His kingdom. But a crowd gathered, curious or in earnest, to hear Him talk. He got into a boat moored at the shore and sat in it. The crowd stood on the beach watching Him and waiting to hear Him.

From His place in the boat Jesus looked up at the people, men, women and children in their multi-colored garments, standing above Him. Back of them were the rugged, rocky hills. To His right was Capernaum; to His left were the beautiful fields of Gennesaret. Jesus spoke in a new way, not preaching but telling parables. A parable is a real, possible, or probable story that by comparison sets forth a truth suggested by the parable and having spiritual meaning and value. The parable was addressed to all. As a story it would interest the hearers; some would be thoughtful and get the deeper or higher truth.

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

The responses Jesus had received to His teachings, the results He would get from this crowd, probably suggested to Jesus all that He embodied in this parable. Likely, in sight of all of them, a sower was broadcasting seed on an adjacent field. Jesus observed how intent he was on his sowing; with equal generosity he threw the seed, allowing it to fall on different conditions of soil. To Jesus it was clear that four conditions of soil were in the field, and about each condition He had something to say.

There was *the trampled soil*. It was good soil but it had become a path across the field. Fields were not fenced, but paths, often used by people, divided them. The path was in the convenient place for the traveler, no matter how it interfered with the field. This hard surface received the seed but did not conceal it. Birds were plentiful. They watched for the uncovered seed and, swooping down on the path, picked it up.

There was *the thin soil*. Great patches of the soil were in shallow layers over the bedrock, which lay near the surface. By rocky places He did not mean full of stones of different sizes. The promise for growth in such soil was hopeful. But the fact that the heat-holding rock quickened the germinating and growing of the seed was offset by the fact that the thin soil was soon dried out and consequently the growing grain withered and died; the roots were unable to gather enough moisture to keep the plant alive.

There was *the thorny soil*. Thorns, thistles, briars and weeds of many varieties grow in abundance in the fertile soil of Palestine. The kind of plow used and the method of using it do not destroy the roots of these unwanted pests. With sturdy stubbornness these roots refuse to die. Each one starts to grow rapidly. Naturally some of the seed would fall where these roots remained, and would be unable to push forth a plant that could battle its way to maturity among the thorns. It would be choked to death.

There was *the true, or triumphant soil*. It was not better soil than the other, but it had a better chance. It was unhindered. It was not filled with thorns; it had depth; it was not crossed by pathways. It had nothing to do but let nature take its course. Its fertility could stimulate growth. It could grow a satisfying crop for the sower. However, even the unhindered soil was not of uniform quality, for the harvester gathered here a hundred times as much as he had sowed, there sixty times as much and yonder only thirty times as much. But even thirty-fold justified Jesus in calling it "good soil."

No explanation was made to the crowd of the meaning of this parable. But Jesus closed it with the call for thought about it, using an expression not infrequently on His lips. It was a call to His hearers to receive His words as in unhindered soil.

THE PURPOSE OF PARABLES

Verses 10-17.—The crowd dispersed and when alone with His disciples, they asked why He had adopted the parabolic mode of teaching the crowd. In answer Jesus noted the special place held by His disciples as compared with the people in general. They were privileged to receive the truth and its meaning was revealed to them. They were given insight into the truth. Mystery is something that must forever be a secret unless it be revealed. So it was given to them to receive and comprehend the meaning of His words. Others were not so favored. They would not take His words of direct truth in the right way but would distort their meaning. They would be men who see things without discerning them, or hear things without heeding them. In consequence, it was better to give them the essential truths in private conversation and express it to the heedless crowds in parables. There was a law about this; the disciples would increase in understanding and the crowd would decrease in understanding. Matthew points out how Jesus here fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah, which he quotes.

An added beatitude was spoken by Jesus. It was for their encouragement, since they were privileged beyond the multitude. More than this they were more favored than any who had gone before, whether prophets or righteous men. What these had longed for had been granted to the disciples.

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER INTERPRETED

Verses 18-23.—It was for the disciples only to hear the interpretation of the parable. The explanation pointed back to the attitude of

people to His own ministry, and forward to what the disciples would meet as ministers. It should be noted that in the interpretation Jesus indicates nothing about enemies, but only about the careless, thoughtless, heedless people, who see and hear and straightway go away and forget.

There were *the indifferent hearers*. These are pre-occupied, using their receptive powers for other things, and content with whatever goes on. They are people of habits and these, like many passing feet over a pathway, make them hardened and indifferent to any good seed of truth that chances to fall on them. They do not take it in. "By habitual trifling with spiritual appeals they have grown callous or, in the phrase of a bygone generation, Gospel-hardened." They are not active enemies of the Gospel; they are merely indifferent to it.

There are *the superficial hearers*. They are very promising, responding quickly and with enthusiasm to the Gospel. They have a veneer of goodness that is spasmodically put on. They jump into discipleship without counting the cost. They want to appear well and have the immediate applause. They "are the impulsive, unstable sort so common in every religious revival, emotional but shallow, easily enkindled to inconsiderate enthusiasm and as easily discouraged and made to stumble, when their ardor cools and difficulty arises." The quickly started zeal as quickly dies because the truth has not taken deep root in their lives.

There are *the pre-occupied hearers*. They want to receive all the good in the world for themselves and to retain it all. They want mammon and they want God. They eradicate great sins but retain their tiny roots. They do not come clean. None are more promising. But they do not hold out. They are divided in attention and strength. They gradually give less concern to spiritual things and more to material things. In the end the truth is smothered in their souls and doubtless they are in appearance and in reality the hindered lives. At best they perfect no fruit. Whatever they produce aside from thorns will be a short crop of scrawny righteousness.

There are *the productive hearers*. These receive, retain and reproduce in satisfying abundance. They give themselves a chance. They maintain right attitudes toward God always. They allow themselves to be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. Their spiritual productiveness will vary, not all persons being alike fruitful for God. "The standard of a man's spiritual attainment is according as a man hath, not according as he hath not."

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

THE GENEROUS SOWER

To sow, that was his purpose. He had the seed, plenty of it and it was good. The field was before him. He walked over it and broadcast the seed with the wide swing of his arm. He sowed generously, not withholding his hand because here and there were spots of small promise. Jesus said that is the way He sows good seed in human lives.

He treats all with generosity, giving each the same chance. Most of us know just how generous He has been, but not all of us are appreciative of His generosity.

The Church follows this practice for its own people. The sermon is given to all, the worship is for all to use, the opportunities are offered alike to all. The Church at times fails to be generous with the outsiders. It sows but little seed in the highways and byways of humanity. It discriminates among nationalities, races and social conditions. Individual Christians are not always generous in giving the Gospel to others; they are selective and a bit particular about where their work is to be done.

HINDERING PATHS

The Gospel, always good, is often hindered by paths that cross human lives. Habits of sin run across a life and make it impervious to the Gospel. Its truth falls on it but cannot get into it, for the Gospel has no way of forcing itself into a life; it depends on being received. There are habits of corrupt thought that keep the Gospel out, and habits of Pharisaical satisfaction that repulse the Gospel. There are habits of self-goodness that despise the Gospel. Paths, hindering paths, make it easy for Satan to snatch the Gospel away from a life on which it has been generously sowed.

He was a fine citizen, an admired man in his community, honest, moral; he was praised by neighbors and business associates. Prudentially he attended church and received the Gospel, but he kept Christ out of his heart as Saviour. He had too many hindering paths.

VENEERED SIN

This is so easy and it seems quite popular. Men want the appearance and the standing of a Christian, but retain the hidden sin life. Jesus regarded this as a hopeless state. It made fine starts and honestly undertook to live right, but it could not last. The veneered sin dried it up, burned it out. Judas was of this type.

At best sin that is covered up, no matter how skillfully and attractively veneered, tends to superficiality in Christian culture. Men try to be better than they can be, as long as they are self-deceived in the supposition that what they hide from human eyes is harmless. God is not mocked either by fine deeds or by concealed sin. The thin veneer can have no life-stimulating and life-retaining quality that endures. The Gospel must penetrate the depths of mind and heart and break up and cast out the sin; the life must be genuine clear through, if any fruit is to be matured.

LITTLE THORN ROOTS GROW

Resolutions annually drafted at the beginning of the year promise drastic alterations in conduct. Often they anticipate a thorough riddance of immoral practices. There is an honest endeavor to get rid of dangerous habits. It is trite to say that resolutions are speedily forgotten. Wickedness in us never loses heart or gets discouraged. Nothing

but its total eradication will assure freedom from its steady growth. Each little tendency to wrong, each occasional desire for the reindulgence in the evil habit, each permission of the thought of fondling again the old iniquity, encourages the return of the old ways of evil. Such a life is not rid of dangers. It is preoccupied with remains of potential wrong doings. Satan misses no chance to stimulate the sturdy growth of the tiniest root of former sin which has not been thrown out. Many a Christian life has been smothered by the slow but steady return of his former sins. The reformed drunkard goes back by way of the social glass. The saved roué falls over a little carelessness. The little roots, how they grow!

NOTHING ELSE TO DO

The good ground had nothing to do but mature the harvest. It had a fine unhindered chance. It could do its best. It was not wasting its strength in growing thorns. It lost none of the seed by carelessly made paths. It had no blighted plants because of concealed rocks. It could give its time and strength to the one desirable task. It had nothing else to do.

This is the ideal state for the Christian—to have nothing to do but produce a good harvest. Doubtless there are many who are spared many hindrances and to whom living a fruitful Christian life is as matter of fact as for the sun to shine and water to flow down hill. But to arrive at that highly desirable state minute preparation must have been made. Habits to fight and throw out, sin to dig up and roll away, a continual picking up and destroying of tendencies to wrong—this is the price of being good ground. Let none be deluded by appearances; the finest Christian often has the severest struggle to concentrate his powers on doing nothing else than maturing a good harvest.

VARIETIES OF PRODUCTIVENESS

How gracious of Jesus to point out the fact that even the good ground did not all produce similar quantities! What was produced was of like quality, but the difference was in quantity. Lives are just like that. Not all Christians have the same amount of results to show, but all Christians can show a good kind of results. That range from thirty to a hundred fold is our hope. The soil was all called good, in spite of the difference of productiveness. Each had done its best; that was all it was expected to do.

Here is a family in which one child becomes a missionary, another a minister, another an educator, another a farmer, but that does not classify them before God. Each matures an acceptable harvest from his own field. In a church one becomes a leader, another a follower, but each ranks alike before God, if he does his best. There are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

What is meant by parables of the kingdom? Prepare a list of illustrations from your own observation for each of the parables of the lesson.

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 13:24-52. (Print verses 31-33, 44-52.)
(American Standard Revision Text)

31. Another parable set he before them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like unto a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field:

32. which indeed is less than all seeds; but when it is grown, it is greater than the herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the heaven come and lodge in the branches thereof.

33. Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till it was all leavened.

44. The kingdom of heaven is like unto a treasure hidden in the field; which a man found, and hid; and in his joy he goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.

45. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a merchant seeking goodly pearls:

46. and having found one pearl of

great price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it.

47. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind;

48. which, when it was filled, they drew up on the beach; and they sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but the bad they cast away.

49. So shall it be in the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the righteous,

50. and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.

51. Have ye understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea.

52. And he said unto them, Therefore every scribe who hath been made a disciple to the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a householder, who bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.

GOLDEN TEXT: The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.—Romans 14:17.

LESSON GOAL: To set forth some of the problems and procedures in the kingdom of God on earth.

LESSON PLAN

I. THE PARABLE OF THE TARES IN THE FIELD (24-30, 34-43).
(Presence of evil in the Church; what to do about it.)

II. THE PARABLES OF THE MUSTARD SEED AND OF THE LEAVEN (31-33).
(Progress of the Kingdom.)

III. THE PARABLES OF THE HIDDEN TREASURE AND OF THE PEARL (44-46).
(Present Worth of the Kingdom.)

IV. THE PARABLE OF THE DRAG-NET (47-52).
(Permanent Separation of the Good from the Bad.)

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

Verse 31: *A grain of mustard seed.*—The mustard plant grows wild and is also cultivated in Syria. The seed is small compared with the size of its "tree," which at times is "as tall as a horse and its rider." It was used figuratively to indicate something very small. Says W. H. Thomson, "In the proper season the traveler in Gennesaret may ride by mustard-bushes as high as his horse, and alive with flocks of merry bulb-finches or of rock-pigeons feeding upon its seeds."

Verse 33: *Leaven . . . hid in three measures of meal.*—The literal meaning is "ferment." It is "a common biblical metaphor to represent

a pervasive, permeating force, most frequently a corrupting evil force.” —*Mickle*. Jesus uses it here in a good sense, a matter of purification or giving useful life. “Except in this one parable, leaven is used of the working of evil.” The three measures, or “seahs” were the usual amount for a baking. (Gen. 18: 6).

Verse 44: *A treasure hidden in the field.*—It was common practice to hide precious things in the ground. The death or removal of the hider caused the place to be unknown. Many instances are recorded of rich discoveries of treasures long buried, as excavations for new buildings were made. “About forty years ago (sixty now) several copper pots containing gold coin of the age of Philip of Macedon were found by workmen digging in a garden of Sidon.”—*Dr. E. W. Rice*.

Verse 47: *Like unto a net.*—This was not a cast-net, but a drag-net. “This was an oblong net of immense length, employed near the shore. The bottom edge was weighted with lead, and swept the bottom of the sea. The upper edge floated on the surface of the sea, supported by corks. Escape from it was impossible, and when it was dragged to shore, it contained every fish in the area of the sea which it had swept.” —*J. R. Dummelow*.

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

These parables have to do with the kingdom of heaven on earth. For all practical purposes in our study we may think in terms of the Christian Church, its people, its enlargement, its methods of work, its hindrances and how to meet them, and its amazing successes. The seven parables of the chapter should be considered together; the parable of the sower should not be regarded as separated in purpose from the other six.

THE PARABLE OF THE TARES IN THE FIELD

Verses 24-30, 34-43.—This parable has to do with *the presence of evil in the Church and what to do about it*. Out of the richness of His understanding of the Church Jesus set before the people another comparison. It told how in the Church there comes to be evil, secret, insidious, despicable, destructive. It told how a faithful man prepared his field, selected good seed and sowed it. He left it to grow in its natural way. He did not need to watch it continually. When time for sleep came he slept. Taking advantage of the protection of darkness his enemy ran over the field and scattered the seed of tares. The unsuspecting owner would not discover what had happened until the tares and wheat had grown together until near harvest time. In appearance tares and wheat were so nearly alike that the presence of the tares would not soon be detected. But the difference was bound to show itself. The time for the wheat to shoot into ears and for the tares to do likewise betrayed the sad fact that the deceptive tares had been living in the field as good grain.

The servants were worried over the discovery and wanted to do something to get rid of the tares. To leave them and run the risk of having the tare seeds ground into flour with the wheat, was to invite ser-

ious sickness to any one who ate bread made from this flour. The servants were rightfully zealous but the owner was wiser than they. He knew how the roots of tares and wheat were intertwined. He knew how much wheat would be trampled down and pulled up by the process suggested by the servants. (Both servants and owner knew that the misfortune had resulted to the field by the evil work of an enemy.) The owner's plan was different and wiser. It was not for the servants to make the separation. The reapers would do that, under the instruction of the owner to gather the tares first and bind them into bundles for burning and then to gather the wheat into the barn. This was what took place frequently. This parable was true to fact, and only the thinker would see back of its simple statements the profound teaching of the Master.

The disciples were eager to hear Jesus' explanation of this parable. It was beyond them to see through it. They knew that it had a deeper meaning than appeared on the surface. They received the explanation from Jesus when they were alone with Him in a house, an explanation easily understood by us.

THE PARABLES OF THE MUSTARD SEED AND OF THE LEAVEN

Verses 31-33.—For the encouragement of the disciples as they faced the uncertain future in their work as well as to remove any doubt about the outcome of His work in the world, Jesus set before them *the progress of the kingdom* in two parables: The growth of the mustard seed into a large plant or tree showed the "outward expansion" of the kingdom and the leaven working through the meal suggested the "inward permeation" of the kingdom, making each member thereof a living, active force.

What otherwise might have seemed an extravagant dream, the bringing of the world into the kingdom of God, Jesus made as natural and certain as the ordinary growth of the mustard plant. From a small seed there grew a tree so large and sturdy that wild birds found it a convenient resting place. Doubtless many of these mustard plants were in sight as Jesus talked; their branches probably were filled with birds.

However, this growth would be gradual, but persistent, continuing, like leaven in meal, until it touched all the world's people. The following quotation about world affairs sets forth the truth Jesus taught: "It appears to be a general rule that what is to last long should be slowly matured and gradually improved, while every sudden effort, however gigantic, to bring about the speedy execution of a plan calculated to endure for ages is doomed to exhibit symptoms of premature decay from its very commencement."

THE PARABLES OF THE HIDDEN TREASURE AND THE PEARL

Verses 44-46.—But the kingdom, in reaching its vastness of extent and its potency of influence, at each stage of its development would *manifest its present worth*. It would always have an attractive value

for which discriminating persons would gladly pay much. It might be an unexpected discovery as the treasure found in the field, or it might be the result of a studied search like the priceless pearl.

To some the kingdom would come as a surprise but, realizing its immediate value, they would secure it at any cost, giving up all to procure it, as did the Philippian jailer, the centurion, and, in fact, all the apostles. (Isa. 65: 1). To others the appreciation of the worth of the kingdom would come after trying to be satisfied with other things, but, failing to be satisfied, they finally discover the only source of satisfaction, and give up all else to secure it. Luther's experience illustrates this.

THE PARABLE OF THE DRAG-NET

Verses 47-52.—This parable links up with the parable of the tares. It is one His fisher-folk disciples could appreciate. It pointed to *the permanent separation of the good from the bad*. It indicated that there would be unmistakable discrimination in this separation. If men could do this with fish, certainly God could do it with people.

The parables are concluded with a question which the disciples answer affirmatively. Then Jesus declared that it was His prerogative to set forth the old and with it the new. In not destroying the law but fulfilling it, He did not limit Himself to that alone. He added what was new, not contradictory of the old but growing out of it; the old truth in a new way to meet the advancing conditions of men and of the kingdom. He had the old, but He had more than that. "Christian teaching, unlike that of the scribes of the old dispensation, would be marked by the note of originality and authority. At the same time it would be linked in continuity with the old, completing and not annulling the revelation made to them of old time."

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

HOW CAN IT BE?

The earth is encircled with Christianity. Its influence is potent in world affairs. Millions have found its teachings satisfying to live by and to die by. Merciful procedures are evident in industry where the teachings of Christ are known. Investments that stagger ordinary figures are made in the name of the Church. Lives are devoted to propagating its message and gathering people throughout every part of the world into its membership. Where and how did this colossal institution get its start? It was in small Palestine, among common people that Jesus launched the Christian Church. From that insignificant nucleus it has grown into a world-wide institution. The tiny seed has become a great tree, strong enough and extensive enough to welcome the world. How can it be that from so small a beginning it has become so tremendous in size and power? It had life in it. It was directed by God. It has been carried on by God-guided people. It is the outcome of the divine plan.

THE PERSONAL TOUCH SYSTEM

Leaven works gradually, intimately, continually and thoroughly. It proceeds by a touch system, one leavened particle leavens other particles it touches and in the end the meal is all leavened. The ceaseless advance of the kingdom of God has resulted from a similar method. There has been no divine sweeping of unresisting souls into the kingdom. Jesus told the apostles, the apostles told others, and these in turn told another generation. The growth has been in just that fashion, a kind of personal touch method under the direction of God.

The fact is that what we know of Christ and God and the Spirit and the power of God unto salvation we received from others who had themselves received it from others. The untouched world that needs to be brought to Christ is dependent on this system. It must be told and led and persuaded and convinced by its contact with Spirit-filled and Christ-saved Christians. The unfinished missionary program waits for the extension of the personal touch system. It must start with "the one next to you." It can continue only by this method. Jesus declared the divine plan for world evangelization when He spoke the parable of the leaven.

A HAPPY DISCOVERY

To him who discovers the Gospel as having present worth for him, there can be no contentment until it is in his possession. He may have been near it all his life, working where it is, living under its influence, but without realizing its worth to him. He may see others enjoying its possession, without his comprehending what they see in it. Then he discovers that it is for him to possess as well as they. He plans to secure it. He pays the price required and it comes into his ownership. No matter how rich he was before, he is richer when the discovered treasure belongs to him.

No other discovery brings such joy of heart, as to find the Gospel with all its enduring, enriching messages and ministries. One man finds gold and is glad; another discovers oil and is delighted; another discovers the secret of flying in safety and is praised by his countrymen; another evolves the plan for preventing deadly contagion and is heralded as a benefactor. But all such discoveries at best have a passing reward. Some later discoverer may find something so much better that the former is pushed aside to be forgotten, to be saddened by disappointment. But to discover the Gospel, the treasure so generously hidden everywhere that any open-eyed, observant man or woman can find it, is to find what is best, always has been best and will remain the best. Nothing can take its place; it will not be supplanted by some later and better discovery.

THE SEEKER FINDS

Note the difference in what Jesus next taught, as He told of the pearl the merchant found. This man was in the pearl-hunting business. He knew pearls. He was alert to find the pearl a little better than any he possessed. At the end of his quest was the priceless pearl, the finest

of them all. He gladly disposed of all his pearls and purchased the one that he knew was the world's rarest and purest and most valuable.

Today men search through literature to find soul comfort. They fortunately fail in this quest until they find Christ in the Gospel. They try all the isms and proposals of human thought as they seek peace of mind and heart, but fortunately they fail until they find their way into the presence of Christ. The facts support this statement. It is no extravagant claim or baseless boast. Too many have searched through the best the mind and genius of man offers without finding what they need, and then have found in Christ every need supplied, for us to hesitate to exalt Him as the Priceless Pearl.

GATHERED OR CAST AWAY

Jesus is discussing the people in His kingdom. He announces a standard for its membership. He makes the claim that He can and does retain the good and throw the bad away. He used a figure fishermen understood. Not all their nets enclosed was good, fit for use, but what was good they kept.

The Christian Church is following this method. It selects its members. It has requirements for its members to meet or lose their place in the Church. The ways of business are much like this. Its products must be of accepted quality, or they are discarded. The label will not be placed on an inferior product. The honor of the business, the retention of a buying public, the service rendered to people depends on a maintained quality. Schools observe this practice; the failing pupil is sent away, but is given a chance to reinstate himself. The reference of Christ is to the final separation, for while men live He gives them a chance to prepare for being of the good who are not cast away.

IMPROVING THE OLD

Christianity was an improvement on Judaism. It did not reject all the old, for truth does not need changing. It was largely in practices and in added truths that Jesus made improvements. All that was usable was retained. But Jesus was the householder, the owner of all truth, and brought forth from His boundless treasury the old and the new.

Luther followed this principle in the reformation. He had discovered the greater truths, and knew they must determine the character of the Church and of the Christian life, but he destroyed nothing just because it was old. He used what was of worth and added what he found in the Scriptures.

This is the way of all true progress. Only the dangerous, the useless need be discarded. We are not to spurn the achievements of the past, but to be content with them makes advancement impossible.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

Read Matthew 13: 53—16: 12. Why was Jesus rejected? Why was John the Baptist killed? What was the dispute with the Pharisees? Why did Jesus keep the mother waiting so long? Was He cruel in this? Why did Jesus warn against hypocrisy?

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 13:53—16:12. (Print 15:21-31.)
(American Standard Revision Text)

21. And Jesus went out thence, and withdrew into the parts of Tyre and Sidon.

22. And behold, a Canaanitish woman came out from those borders, and cried, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a demon.

23. But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us.

24. But he answered and said, I was not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

25. But she came and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.

26. And he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs.

27. But she said, Yea, Lord: for even

the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.

28. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it done unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was healed from that hour.

29. And Jesus departed thence, and came nigh unto the sea of Galilee; and he went up into the mountain, and sat there.

30. And there came unto him great multitudes, having with them the lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and they cast them down at his feet; and he healed them:

31. insomuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb speaking, the maimed whole, and the lame walking, and the blind seeing: and they glorified the God of Israel.

GOLDEN TEXT: Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.—Matthew 7:7.

LESSON GOAL: To show that Jesus teaches sincerity, cares for humanity and responds to faith.

LESSON PLAN

I. JESUS IS REJECTED IN HIS OWN COUNTRY (13:53-58).

II. JESUS MANIFESTS HIS POWER TO HELP MANY (14:1-36).

1. The Death of John the Baptist.
2. The Feeding of the Five Thousand.
3. The Walking on the Sea.

III. JESUS DISPUTES WITH THE PHARISEES (15:1-20).

IV. JESUS USES HIS POWER TO HEAL (21-39).

1. A Quest for Rest.
2. A Request for Help.
3. A Triumphant Faith.
4. A Group of Healings.

V. JESUS CAUTIONS AGAINST HYPOCRISY (16:1-12).

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

Verse 22: *Have mercy on me, O Lord.*—To one who has ever held any prominent or official position in the East the persistency of pleading women is a fact which he will never forget. They will not be driven from their purpose by a rough manner. Severe language does not deter them. They are not wearied by delays. They will sit and wait hour after hour, and come day after day, ignoring all kinds of refusals. They are importunate beyond anything that is ever experienced in our Western life.—*Peloubet's Select Notes.*

Verse 26: *Take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs.*—By children Jesus meant Israel. Dogs were the common scavengers, and were treated with disregard. The Gentiles were called dogs by the Jews, especially by the Pharisees. To call one a dog was to express deepest contempt and hatred for him.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

Jesus' ministry in Galilee had not turned out well. Rejected, denounced, abused, He turned from the crowds to give special instruction to His disciples. Even in this He was interrupted. He withdrew from Galilee to escape the "implacable hostility of the religious and political leaders in Galilee."

He must get away beyond the reach of crowds, and beyond the reach of those who were aware of His healing powers, beyond the reach of those who would bring His career to a premature end. . . . He passed right through Galilee, and reached the territory of Phenicia. Now He was not merely outside the Tetrarchy of Herod Antipas, He was no longer within the limits of the territory which could be called Jewish. Here, among the absolute heathen, it might be expected that He would find what He needed and sought. But it was not so.—*T. H. Robinson, D.D.*

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

JESUS IS REJECTED IN HIS OWN COUNTRY

Matthew 13: 53-58.—Naturally Jesus had a fondness for Nazareth and an earnest hope that its people would accept Him as the Messiah. They had not been without prejudice against Him, but His nearly two years of ministry had given Him a name in other countries. His reputation for teaching and miracles must have reached Nazareth, but, on His return, He fared no better, even worse, than heretofore. His teaching in the synagogue was astonishing but they ruled Him out as a worthy rabbi, because they knew His family and His trade as a carpenter. Rabbis were trained specially from childhood. Jesus had not been so trained. They could not understand how He acquired all these things. They took offense at Him. Jesus passed it off with a cutting proverb, doubtless frequently used at that time. Matthew adds significantly that because of their unbelief His mighty works in Nazareth were limited.

JESUS MANIFESTS HIS POWER

Matthew 14: 1-36.—The story of *the death of John the Baptist* is introduced in connection with the statement of Herod's fear that Jesus, of whose mighty works he had heard, was John the Baptist risen from the dead. Matthew sets down the execution of John the Baptist as the reason for the retreat across the sea of Galilee and tells of *the feeding of the five thousand*. This miracle is recorded by the four gospels with practical agreement, certain details being told by each not related by the others. Following this remarkable manifestation of His power Jesus sent the disciples across the sea by boat, dismissed the multitude and went by himself into the quiet and seclusion of the neighboring hills to pray. He spent most of the night there, and strange to say the disciples were unable to pull their boat across the narrow sea to the opposite shore, because of a raging storm. The account of *the walking on the sea* shows further manifestation of Jesus' power, as did His miraculous

stilling of the tempest. They landed at Gennesaret. His presence was quickly known and His opportunity for healing was enlarged by the eagerness of the people to bring the afflicted to Him.

JESUS DISPUTES WITH THE PHARISEES

Matthew 15: 1-20.—Even Jerusalem was disturbed by what Jesus was doing, and the zealous Pharisees were put to it to discover some way of breaking His grip on the approval of the people. Scribes were sent to Capernaum to find something to expose and condemn. They tried to make a case by questioning Him concerning the failure of His disciples to follow the letter of the traditional ceremonies. It hinged on the fact that they had ceased to perform the ritual hand-washing before eating. Jesus ignored the question but launched into a condemnatory discourse on keeping the spirit rather than the letter of the law. He accused them of burying the law of God under their fine-spun but foolish traditions, and called them hypocrites for exalting human laws above the doctrines of God. After this Jesus addressed the people and later the disciples, explaining what in the final measurement is the cause of defilement. The state of the heart, rather than having hands ceremonially clean, is what counts with God.

JESUS USES HIS POWER TO HEAL

Verses 21-39.—Time was precious and Jesus was desirous of giving the disciples instruction in the mysteries of His kingdom. He had been thwarted in finding a quiet place on the eastern shore; the people followed Him there. Capernaum and regions of Galilee offered no chance for seclusion. Accordingly on a *quest for rest*, or retirement from the hounding Pharisees as well as the crowding people, He turned His course northward and went beyond Palestine, into Phoenicia, into the regions of Tyre and Sidon.

But He was disappointed, for He was soon faced with a *request for help*. The mother of a sick daughter came addressing Him as "Lord" and "Son of David" and asking for mercy on herself because of the serious state of her child. Apparently Jesus ignored her and was deaf to her petition. This seemed a strange way for Him to react to an appeal for help. His usual responses had been kind and helpful. The suggestion of the disciples was met with a harsh word which the woman must have taken to heart as a thrust at her despised nationality. She persisted with a half-pleading, half-demanding call for help. This time Jesus noticed her, but His words were cruelly cutting. He seemed to excuse His refusal by emphasizing her unworthiness, being only a dog in the eyes of a Jew. But hers was a *triumphant faith*. She humbled herself, but kept on asking, willing to have the crumbs, like a little dog under the table. Jesus broke forth in praise of her great faith and assured her that her child would be healed.

Still searching for rest and a chance to teach His disciples, Jesus traveled back toward the sea of Galilee and thought to find a retreat in

the neighboring uplands. But they found Him there, and multitudes of afflicted people were brought to Him and He healed them, much to the amazement of the people. It was this multitude that He fed, four thousand men besides women and children. Then He went away by boat, still seeking seclusion.

JESUS CAUTIONS AGAINST HYPOCRISY

Matthew 16: 1-12.—Jesus was in some obscure place, Magadan or Dalmanutha. It was probably near Tiberias. There the Pharisees and Sadducees annoyed Him with a challenge to prove His claims with a sign from heaven, or in the heavens. Jesus retorted with piercing sarcasm and left them and, with the disciples, hastened across to the eastern side of the sea. Jesus wanted to warn His disciples against trusting the hypocritical Pharisees and Sadducees. They mistook His words as a rebuke for hurrying away without a supply of bread. But this He said was a foolish thought, for why worry about the lack of bread when with Him who had fed the five thousand and the four thousand? They caught His meaning and were more ready to guard themselves against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

A NEED FOR CHRIST EVERYWHERE

Jesus failed to find quiet and rest because wherever He went there was some need to be met. There was a need for Him everywhere. He had something to do for people at each stopping place. He could not see a need without doing something to remove it. Put all these facts together and transfer them to the present and it is clear conditions have not changed. Everywhere there is need for Christ. The home needs Him; the best home is where He is present to meet its needs. The community needs Him; ideal communities are impossible without His example and influence. The shop, the store, the farm needs Him; His help has wrought changes for good in all these. The Church needs Him; it cannot live without Him. The Christians need Him; He makes the Christian possible. The non-Christian needs Him; this is the challenging need of the hour. He can meet it if His people prepare the way for Him to get to the people of the earth who do not yet know Him.

A BEGINNING OF FAITH

It started with hope, a half-doubting hope, that Jesus could cure the sick daughter. It was based on hearsay. It was without background. It rushed into the mother's life and controlled her because she was desperately trying to help her child. This mother's anxious heart was a fit place for even a faint hope to emerge into a determined faith. It may not have been a highly cultured, a thoroughly intelligent, an ecclesiastically cultivated faith, but it was the best the mother had and she used it. It was the substance of what she hoped for; it was a slight evidence of what she desired to see. That mother went to Jesus with her heart

heavy because of her sick child but with her mind filled with a vision of her child cured. Somehow all this was part of her faith, the faith according to which she acted. Like the penitent thief she sought Jesus as her last hope, but as with the thief so with her, it was the first chance to lay her trouble before Jesus. But, no matter how faith in Jesus gets its start, Jesus responds to its sincere pleadings.

A BOLDNESS OF FAITH

Faith must be courageous. Daring, venturing inheres in all faith. To us faith in Jesus has lost much of demand for daring and call for adventuring; experience has put assurance into our faith. We can say, "I know." That mother did not know; she must venture. She braved much in her venturing faith. She was of a different race, despised by the Jews; Jesus would probably disregard her. She could expect the worst; but she dared it. No matter what treatment she received from Him, it would at least not add to her daughter's trouble. And she might gain by the venture. It had been reported that He had power to heal. She had no claim on Him. Her cry for mercy apparently had nothing to commend it. But she courageously called Him Lord; she broke over the barrier of race and called Him Son of David.

"Oh, for a faith that will not shrink,
Though pressed by every foe,
That will not tremble on the brink
Of any earthly woe!"

FAITH UNDER TEST

What strange change has come over Jesus? Where is His tender heart, His sympathetic word, His soothing touch? Has He left behind Him all His concern for human suffering? Why this silence? But the woman's faith stood that test. The disciples seemed more kind, but their suggestion was met with words that would have crushed a weaker faith than this mother's. She came as a humbled worshiper. She was spurned as a dog, but as a dog she was willing to have but a crumb. Even His least blessings would be enough for her. It was a hard test, but her faith wavered not. It hoped on and prayed submissively.

Faith is always subject to tests. It travels a long, hard road in which there are sufferings too hard to bear, delays not understood, failures seemingly undeserved, rebuffs unexpected. Bunyan described Christian's faith as ever tested, but so was Paul's and Peter's and Luther's and yours. It is by these tests that faith grows strong and only the strong faith can stand the never-ceasing tests.

WHEN FAITH WINS

A winning faith secures many satisfying proofs of its victory. There is the gaining of what is sought, the commendation for success and the comforting feeling that faith's daring venture was not foolish or in vain. Certainly this mother had these proofs. Jesus praised her faith, her daughter was healed, and her effort had not been for nought.

Faith has not won until Jesus commends it. With His commendation always comes faith's reward. It is the faith that secures what it seeks that Jesus commends. One faith asks God to save a wayward son; the son's acceptance of Christ is the reward and the token of Christ's commendation. One faith seeks opportunity to witness for Christ in China, or elsewhere; the commission to be a missionary is the reward and the assurance that Christ commends the faith. One faith strives to live as a Christian should; the gradual suppression of sinful habits and the acquisition of Christian traits are at once the reward and the approval of the faith.

CLIMBING UP TO JESUS

Jesus sat on a mountain side, but the people climbed up to Him. It paid them to go to the trouble to get to Jesus. Perhaps it is fanciful, but there are many people who are trying to climb up to Jesus today. Their minds are not convinced that He is the Son of God, that He is God, that His atonement is necessary and available for them. They want to be sure about all these things. They have a hard climb to make. So many obstacles get in the way; intelligent friends think Him only a good, great man; books are read that belittle Him; substitutes are proposed to take His place. It is hard to get around these troublesome rocks and climb up to Him. Youth are worried because they do not see the way that leads to Him. They hear the Church scorned and the Bible deplored. They are told that in self is all the guide and help they need. They are urged to be free and pursue their own bent. They hear that being a Christian is an acknowledgment of inadequacy in self. Will they reach Christ? Can they climb up to Him? Many of them are climbing, many have scaled the rugged mountain and are among His disciples.

MORE THAN WONDERING

Of course Jesus causes wonder. His teaching is different; His works are marvelous; His promises are too good to be true. The multitude saw what He did and wondered, but that was all. They stopped with being amazed. They missed much by doing nothing but express their wonder in outbursts about the God of Israel. Somehow they linked Jesus with their God. But they did not take Jesus seriously; they did not become His followers. They were all ready to be sent away from Him, after He had miraculously fed them.

Too many people today are wonderers about Jesus. They find His teachings imbedded in Oriental sacred books and they wonder about His authority. They see how men are transformed in conduct by the Gospel of Christ, and they wonder how it came about. To wonder about Jesus is good, but to stop short of personal fellowship with the wonderful Jesus is to miss much, in fact every vital, salutary thing about Him.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

Why do we go to Matthew for the Gospel of the Kingdom? What proofs have we that Jesus is the Son of God? What great teachings of Jesus have we studied? List the miracles in the first fifteen chapters of Matthew.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

DEVOTIONAL READING: John 10:7-16.
(American Standard Revision Text)

7. Jesus therefore said unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep.

8. All that came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them.

9. I am the door; by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and go out, and shall find pasture.

10. The thief cometh not, but that he may steal, and kill, and destroy: I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly.

11. I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd layeth down his life for the sheep.

12. He that is a hireling, and not a

shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, beholdeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth, and the wolf snatcheth them, and scattereth them:

13. *he fleeth* because he is a hireling, and careth not for the sheep.

14. I am the good shepherd; and I know mine own, and mine own know me,

15. even as the Father knoweth me, and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.

16. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and they shall become one flock, one shepherd.

GOLDEN TEXT: Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.—Isaiah 9:6.

LESSON GOAL: To show that Jesus is the Son of God and that His teachings and works qualify Him to be King in the kingdom of God.

LESSON PLAN

I. THE FACT OF JESUS THE SON OF GOD.

II. THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS.

III. THE WORKS OF JESUS.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

Our study for the quarter has covered the major portion of Jesus' life on earth. Not a broad expanse of country was noted, for Jesus confined His work to a limited area. Aside from the brief stay in Egypt as a child and His journey into the region of Tyre and Sidon, the life and work of Jesus we have studied centered in the three divisions of Palestine: Judæa, Samaria and Galilee. He was born at Bethlehem, grew up at Nazareth, made occasional trips to Jerusalem, lived at Capernaum, carried on His work for the most part in Galilee. He made three preaching tours in Galilee, proclaiming His message to multitudes and giving special instruction to His disciples. He wrought many miracles, showing His power over human diseases and over material things. His popularity was decreased by the bitter opposition of the Jewish leaders. But He set His face steadfastly toward Jerusalem.

A REVIEW OF THE LESSONS

The lion was accounted of old "the king of the beasts"; and it most fitly symbolized St. Matthew inasmuch as he, the Jewish Evangelist, had for his supreme purpose the commendation of our Lord as the Messiah, "the King of Israel." He begins his Gospel with a genealogy which traces our Lord's descent back in the first instance to David, the

great King, and thence to Abraham, the father of the faithful, thus proving Him at once the Heir of the ancient throne and the Fulfiller of the ancient Promise.—*David Smith.*

The twelve lessons of the quarter may be grouped to show how Matthew planned to persuade the Jews that Jesus was in truth the Messiah. He linked up the facts, teachings and works of Jesus with prophecy, endeavoring thereby to show that it would be no fallacy of judgment or failure of faith for them to honor Jesus and worship Him as the Son of God.

THE FACT OF JESUS THE SON OF GOD

The first three lessons establish this fact. They present unshakable testimony sufficient to satisfy the honest seeker after the truth that Jesus is the Son of God. There is the lesson that presents *the childhood of Jesus*. True to Jewish custom the genealogy of Jesus was traced back to Abraham. He was a lineal descendent of the great Hebrew. Prophecy had clearly forecast the exceptional conditions surrounding His birth. The facts reported fulfilled the prophecy. This seemed quite indisputable. The coming of the Magi, guided by a star, and the directions for finding the new-born King, as well as the strange guidance God gave these Oriental visitors, find explanation in the fact that Jesus, as God's Son, was being announced to the world. The plot of Herod was thwarted by the divine direction which took the Child Jesus into safety in Egypt. The protective guidance of God sent Joseph with his family back to Nazareth. Undeniably the brief record of Jesus' childhood is basis for acceptance of Him as the Son of God.

The account of His *baptism and temptation* presents a cumulative proof that He was the Son of God. He was so recognized at baptism. John had heralded His coming and was prepared to accept Him as the Son of God because of the special witness to Him at baptism. The dove and the Father's voice bore this witness. The temptation stood out as a proof of His loyalty to His divine sonship. Satan's fullest force and trickery could not shake His conviction that He was the Son of God. His triumphant stand, with Satan overpowered, supported the acknowledgment of Jesus as "My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

In a short time *Jesus begins His ministry*. He preached the immediacy of the kingdom and called on men to repent. He called four men, fishermen, and enrolled them as "fishers of men." He began His miracles of healing and built up such a reputation that multitudes followed Him. The attitude of the crowd is evidence that He was more to them than an ordinary man. His ministry was unique. It cannot be accounted for without accepting the fact of His being the Son of God. With this fact established there is good reason to expect new and vital teachings from His lips.

THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS

In the Sermon on the Mount Matthew brought together some of the characteristic teachings of Jesus. They deal with Christian life in

many of its relationships, warning against false ideals and corrupt practices, promising special care and ultimate rewards, and setting in the clear His purposes both in respect to what was time-honored by the Jews in their religion and in respect to vital innovations of doctrine and life which Jesus came to establish.

He knew and declared the *standards of the kingdom*. The blessings assured to His followers, if they exemplified His spirit, made the proposed kingdom attractive to His humble disciples. He had a specific work for them to perform. He asserted His right to make rules for living in the kingdom since He was King. As subjects of the King they were to be diligent preservers of the divine law, not as a matter of detailed obedience but because they wanted the spirit of all laws to be realized in human conduct. They would have foes, but they were to deal with them not in vengeance but in forgiveness. It was largely a new standard, but Jesus prescribed it; His followers have discovered no good reason for altering the standard.

The subjects of the King were always to be *putting God's kingdom first*. Jesus repudiated personal pride in good works. What is done is to be for God's glory. Even in prayer Jesus prescribed a form of words at once comprehensive and tending to make the petitioner think constantly of how God's kingdom in the world and in himself could be promoted. The lure of permanent riches is centered in what is entrusted to God, not in the gold and silver of the world stored in uncertain store-houses. Above all there must be full dependence on God, and a ceaseless endeavor to be in and of the kingdom of God.

The subjects of the King were in constant need of *warnings and promises*. Jesus understood well the exaltation of self, and the sad results bound to ensue. Against this tendency He warned. He laid down a rule for conduct; we call it the "golden rule." The outcome of a life that sincerely obeys God and cultivates the ennobling virtues acclaimed by Jesus as pleasing to Him and profitable to all men, is good fruit and an established life, that struggles through violent storms unshaken.

In lesson nine we saw *Jesus teaching about Himself*. One of the best insights we have into the work of Jesus is in His answer to the messengers from John. What they saw and heard, while near Him at work, was proof of Jesus' method in proving His Messiahship. He was fearless in denouncing those who rejected Him. He could speak to God as His Father. He could address the wearied world with a message of promised comfort. He pushed aside the letter of the Sabbath law to minister to the afflicted. He spoke out bold and strong in silencing His foes and opened the way for men and women to become even more truly of His kin than if their veins carried the same blood as His.

In the *parables of the kingdom* Jesus made clear His conception of the workings of the kingdom. The *parable of the sower* emphasizes personal responsibility to make right use of the Gospel. It comes as seed generously scattered by Jesus. It receives various treatment owing

to the different conditions of heart and life obtaining in the recipient. When there is unhindered soil, the consequent harvest is praiseworthy. God's kingdom depends on what men do with His messages to them. Evil sneaks into the kingdom and hypocritically insinuates itself into the most promising parts of the kingdom, but the fate of evildoers is dreadful and their final disposal is in the hands of the specially appointed angels of God.

The kingdom has an extensive and an intensive growth and development. Nothing is more amazing than that from so small a start the kingdom of God on earth has become an earth-encircling institution into which all classes of men are gathered for protection and peace. The obligation of each Christian to share in extending the kingdom was not overlooked by our Lord. He is dependent on the influence for righteousness that follows our touching the people next to us.

The kingdom is discovered by some who are not looking for it. In their surprise at its immeasurable value to them they spare nothing in their zealous determination to possess it. It is at times found by them who are in earnest search for a soul quietive. After experimenting with many things, many of the choicest products of human reasoning and construction, they find that after all the pearl of great price for them, the one thing always sought for is the Gospel. To get its truth as their own they gladly part with all else.

The kingdom on earth has a way of gathering all kinds. It does not keep all it gathers. Some are unfit for preservation, useless and consequently cast aside. But it is not to be overlooked that God has made ample provision whereby the number of those to be cast away may be steadily decreased.

THE WORKS OF JESUS

In lessons seven, eight and twelve, we have specific studies of some of the deeds of Jesus. Under *healing and helping* are enumerated such miracles as cleansing a leper, curing the centurion's servant, restoring the mother of Peter's wife. He stilled the tempest in the sea of Galilee, cast out the demons from the Gadarene, raised the daughter of a ruler, opened the eyes of two blind men and ministered to others in affliction. Whenever He saw a need that none but He could meet, He met it. Chapters eight and nine contain a cumulative proof of the supernatural power of Jesus.

Just before the account of *the twelve sent forth* there is a record of a preaching tour, in which Jesus traveled throughout Galilee, visiting villages and cities, teaching in synagogues and gathering a sweeping view of the plentiful harvest that was likely to be wasted for want of reapers. He sent forth His disciples under commission to be true representatives of Him. He advised them as to dangers and proper conduct. He did not deceive them but informed them of the strenuous service that confronted them. There was nothing doleful or hopeless in their task. They had His word for it that the Father would provide

for them. Above all He wanted them to realize that they were standing in His stead, and that rejection of them was not a personal affront to them, but to Him. On the other hand they were not to take personal pride in their successes, for it was not they who were being received but He.

The twelfth lesson was *Jesus teaching and healing* but it presented chiefly the use of His power in healing the daughter of the mother, a Canaanitish woman, whose petitions would not be quieted until she had what she sought. She was bold enough to seek Jesus for help. She was courageous in her persistency. She became victorious in faith, and went to her home to find that what Jesus promised had come true. Jesus heeded the call of earnest faith. When faith goes to Jesus, He seems powerless to refuse its requests. Probably this is the reason why we have no hesitancy in going to Him; but we must be sure that our faith is strong enough to face some testings.

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

THE FORTUNATE CHILD

Could we say that Jesus was a fortunate child? If we used present methods of judging, we probably would say He was far from fortunate. His humble surroundings, His lack of advantages, His circumscribed life, and a score of other undesirable conditions would hardly be chosen today as the ideal environment for a child of fortune. But Jesus was fortunate in having a religious home. He never knew anything else than reverence for God, for God's word, for the worship of God. He had been taught the things of God. He was a child of a home where religious training was a matter of course.

The record of the world's worthies gives basis for the assertion that religious training in their childhood laid the foundation for their stalwart characters, without which they would not have deserved the plaudits of their people. The finest asset any home can guarantee to its children is Christian training. The home that upholds God and Christ and the Bible and the Church and prayer and all that enters into Christian living sends forth its children as fortunate indeed.

FAIREST LORD JESUS

Fairest Lord Jesus!
Ruler of all nature!
O Thou of God and man the Son!
Thee will I cherish,
Thee will I honor,
Thee, my soul's glory, joy and crown.

Fair are the meadows,
Fairer still the woodlands,
Robed in the blooming garb of spring;
Jesus is fairer,
Jesus is purer,
Who makes the woeful heart to sing.

Fair is the sunshine,
Fairer still the moonlight,
And all the twinkling starry host;
Jesus shines brighter,
Jesus shines purer
Than all the angels heaven can boast.

—From the German.

ONE IN THE KINGDOM

The kingdom of God is very large. It lasts through the ages, it extends to far corners of the earth. It has millions of subjects who live in allegiance to the King. But this innumerable host is made up of individuals, one and one and one ad infinitum. With so many the King does not forget one. He knows each one, and cares for each one. It is something to belong to such a King.

It is easy to fall into the deceptive mood which suggests that Jesus cannot look after me, when He has so many. This may lead to moral and religious indifference. It may turn us into strivers for the things of the earth, as though these were of prime importance. This feeling of nothingness in the kingdom may bring discouragement, even complaint. But, God is great enough, His knowledge is intensive enough, His love selective enough to concentrate all we need on each of us. Just a crumb from the loaf satisfies the one in the kingdom whose faith submissively asks and as submissively receives.

A LEADER TO FOLLOW

Jesus is the fully authenticated pathfinder for every life, for all life. There is not a wilderness so dense that He cannot penetrate it. There is not a mountain so high that He cannot scale it. There is not a tribe so barbaric that He cannot find some good in it. There is not a nation so civilized that He cannot lift it higher. There is not a sickness so dire that He cannot minister to it. There is not a sin so foul that He cannot forgive it. There is not a sorrow so deep that He cannot wipe the tears away. There is not a suffering of body so intense, of mind so poignant, of disappointment so keen, that He cannot help bear it. There is not a life so low that He cannot redeem it, so high that He cannot use it—if you will follow, when He goes before, where He leads.—*The Life of the Spirit.*

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

Read Matthew 16: 13—17: 27. Where was Caesarea Philippi? Why did Jesus go there? What was the significance of Peter's confession? What led to Peter's rebuke of Christ? How was Peter a stumbling-block to Jesus? How can saving life result in its loss?



WOMEN AT THE SEPULCHRE

SECOND QUARTER

The Gospel of the Kingdom—Studies in Matthew

Second
Quarter

THE LAW OF THE CROSS

Lesson I
April 6

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 16:13—17:27. (Print 16:13-26.)

(American Standard Revision Text)

16:13 Now when Jesus came into the parts of Cæsarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Who do men say that the Son of man is?

14. And they said, Some say John the Baptist; some, Elijah; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.

15. He saith unto them, But who say ye that I am?

16. And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

17. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven.

18. And I also say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

19. I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

20. Then charged he the disciples

that they should tell no man that he was the Christ.

21. From that time began Jesus to show unto his disciples, that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised up.

22. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall never be unto thee.

23. But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art a stumbling-block unto me: for thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men.

24. Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

25. For whosoever would save his life shall lose it: and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it.

26. For what shall a man be profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and forfeit his life? or what shall a man give in exchange for his life?

GOLDEN TEXT.—If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.—Matthew 16:24.

LESSON GOAL.—To show that the acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour implies a service faithfully rendered under favorable and unfavorable circumstances alike.

LESSON PLAN

I. A GREAT CONFESSION. (16:13-16.)

II. A GREAT REPLY. (16:17-20.)

III. A GREAT LIFE. (16:21-28.)

IV. A GREAT MANIFESTATION. (17:1-13.)

V. A GREAT SERVICE. (17:14-22.)

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

Verse 19: *I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven.*—The key has been regarded as the symbol of authority. When a change

of government came in an Eastern city the keys of its gates were passed over to the new rulers, thus signifying they were in authority. A scribe was given a key upon taking up his duties in token of his authority in interpreting the law. As the scribe or rabbi interpreted the Jewish law, Peter would now render decisions in accordance with the teachings of Christ.

Verse 21: *And suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes.*—The elders were probably men of influence and experience selected from among the heads of the Jewish families, while the chief priests were the high-priest together with the heads of the twenty-four courses of priests. The scribes were men chosen because of their knowledge of the law of Moses.

The scribe is a man of importance in a town or village since he may possibly be the only person who can read or write a letter. While customs have not changed since Old Testament times, and the scribe may be recognized on the street by his garments of linen and the ink-horn in his belt, Christian mission schools cause his services to be less in demand.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

A large part of the eighteen fruitful months that Jesus spent in Galilee was consumed in extensive preaching tours through the province. On those tours His disciples accompanied Him. Crowds of people along the way of His travels flocked to hear Him. He had little time to Himself. His first purpose was to bring the Gospel to the inhabitants in the outlying districts who had not had much opportunity to hear Him. His second purpose was to withdraw Himself from Capernaum for a season where much opposition was developing.

So pressed was Jesus by the crowds that He had been able to find little time free enough from interruptions to take His intimate disciples aside for the purpose of instructing them in the essentials of the kingdom. Less than a year remained for Him to be with them, and if they were to be endowed with wisdom and vision and enthusiasm necessary to continue the work after His death and resurrection it was imperative that He should have some time free from distractions to spend with them alone. No one knew that more than He. An effort to obtain that freedom was made, with satisfactory results.

The place was Cæsarea Philippi, a city toward the base of Mt. Hermon, and not far from the headwaters of the Jordan. It got its name from Cæsar, the emperor of Rome, and Philip who enlarged and beautified the city. It lay far enough from the centers in which most of His hearers lived to permit Him to have liberty of action for a season. It was all the more important that He should have a period alone with His disciples, for the time had come when He felt it necessary to begin telling them of His approaching death.

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

A GREAT CONFESSION

16:13-16. We are not surprised that Jesus wanted to hear from the lips of His disciples a statement of their estimate of Him. We might pause long enough to inquire why it was that He did not ask them what they thought of His sermons, or His miracles, or His plans for the future. They are all important questions. But the question that goes to the heart of everything is the one He asked, "Who do men say that

the Son of man is?" There are people who laud His sayings who do not seem to think much of Him. There are those who deny His miracles and yet profess to accept His claims. There is no doubt He believed that the right attitude toward Him, His person, and His relation to the Father was the all-important matter.

The disciples might have given in their reply a much fuller answer than they did. They might have answered something like this: "They say thou art a glutton and a winebibber, that thou art beside thyself and a fanatic, that thou art an enemy of thy people Israel." Even Peter, impetuous as he was, did not report these uncomplimentary things. He reported the best he knew of the popular estimate of our Lord. It was widely held that Jesus was a reincarnation of one of the great men of Israel, John, or Elijah, or Jeremiah, or another of the prophets. The foremost apostle told Jesus that that was what men were saying about Him.

Jesus followed that question with another: "But who say ye that I am?" He did not feel it was sufficient to hold that He is a good man, a wise man, or even the best of men. He is something more than that. What is it? Peter gave the answer that millions of people have held all through the ages: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." If that is true the disciples had been with Him long enough to find it out. They found it out and confessed it. Jesus is divine, the ever-living One, the Son of God, the Word made flesh.

A GREAT REPLY

16:17-20. Most striking is it that Jesus accepted the titles and the homage Peter ascribed to Him. All through the answer of Jesus we see the note of commendation. And what is more He wanted Peter and his associates to understand that this confession was not humanly devised or humanly taught. It was revealed to them from God. Jesus came down from heaven; so did their estimate of Him.

This Jesus Peter confessed and the truth contained in the confession was the foundation upon which the Church, mentioned for the first time here, was to be built. Peter was to be one of the agents in the establishment of the Church, as are all others who make a like confession; but this does not make the Church a human institution. Jesus is the divine-human personality, and so is the Church the divine-human institution. It is the man who is joined to Christ who can accomplish wonders. It is the Spirit dwelling within us who makes impossible things possible.

Our Lord took into account the tremendous opposition the Church would encounter. He saw all the floods of darkness gathering themselves together for the purpose of destroying it. The Church, however, is indestructible. In view of the responsible position the apostles were to hold in this Church Jesus gave to them the power of the keys. They were to represent Him in a very complete manner. If they lived in Him and He lived in them it would come to pass that what they did would

be the same as if He did it. They were His representatives, ambassadors, spokesmen.

A GREAT LIFE

16:21-28. In this chapter we have the first formal confession of Jesus as the Son of God, the first mention of the Church, and the first explicit setting forth by Jesus of His suffering and death. The last announcement seemed to Peter to be unwise and unwarranted. He had not yet come to appreciate how intimately the progress of the race is linked up with self-sacrifice and suffering. He was soon to understand that the death and resurrection of the Saviour were necessary to the establishment of the Church whose progress and security had just been proclaimed.

In explanation of this inevitable principle of the Christian life the Master announced to His disciples that as He was dying on the cross so would they as His followers have to take up their cross daily, and if need be suffer many things and even die for the truth. They had given up their homes, their occupations, and their friends to join themselves to Jesus; now He calls upon them to go further and deny themselves for His sake and the Gospel's, and for the sake of the men and women who needed what by the grace of Christ they had to give. By such self-denial they would come into possession of that larger, fuller, freer life.

A GREAT MANIFESTATION

17:1-13. It is fitting that this scene on the mountain should be united with the lesson that has for its central message the confession of the divine character of Jesus. In the minds of the apostles that confession was to have its sharpest ratification in the transfiguration of the Saviour. Peter had said, "Thou art the Son of the living God;" and here on the mountain there came a voice from heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son." Jesus had broken to His disciples the sad news of His approaching death; and now the men, Moses and Elijah, appeared from heaven, and conversed with Him about the decease He would accomplish at Jerusalem. The entire scene was one to impress the twelve with the unique character of Christ. It would help them to carry into the future their rather carefully formulated conception of Him.

A GREAT SERVICE

17:14-22. But the Christ we know is not the Christ of the mountains alone. It is true He is capable of revealing His own true nature and the nature of the Father on those illuminated summits to which He sometimes leads us; but He is also the Christ of the valleys and the plains. He is the Christ of suffering, sorrow and need. The excellence of His glory may be seen on the lowlands as well as on the heights.

Peter was taught, and so must we all be taught, how to connect the joy and the experience of those choice moments when we are alone with God with the equally joyous experience of ministering to those in dire need. The case of the epileptic boy showed Peter how foolish it would have been to obey his wish that they remain on the mountain.

The Lord does not give us very much that He does not intend us to pour out in service to our fellowmen.

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

THE WORLD'S VIEW OF JESUS

That view varies as it always has. There are those who have very little good to say of Him. The titles they bring Him are condemning rather than complimentary. He has no room in their thoughts. They pass Him by as though He did not exist. They would not go out of their way to hear of Him. They openly say that He stood for some of the worst views and policies that afflict society today. They believe His representatives are conscious deceivers.

Next in the scale are those who say He was a good man, only that and nothing more. They carry many of His sayings on their lips and ideals in their hearts. They believe that the world would be poorer if His example and wise words were blotted out. Their creed may be expressed in this form: "Jesus was a man, the best of men, a man who spoke for God, but still a man." Peter said that was the conception held of Jesus by the rank and file of that day. But Jesus was never satisfied with that creed. It did not go far enough. If He was all they said, He was more; for He could not be good and wise and a spokesman for God unless He was all He claimed. Their confession broke on the rocks of inconsistency.

WHO JESUS IS

Perhaps evangelical Christians may differ on many matters; but certainly the term evangelical cannot be applied to them unless they believe and accept the deity of Christ. He is the Messiah who was promised long ago, the Saviour and Redeemer of the world, the Son of the living God. It does not seem possible to accept the Scriptures without holding this view of Jesus. He is the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His person, and we worship Him with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD

Theodosius the Great, of the fourth century, at one time so far favored the Arians as to let them open their places of worship, and labor to undermine the divinity of Christ. Soon after this, he made Arcadius, a lad about sixteen years of age, an equal partner with him of the throne. And having public notice of the event, the nobles and bishops of the empire came at an appointed day to congratulate him on the occasion. Among the number was Amphilocus, a famous old bishop, who had bitterly suffered in the Arian persecution. He made a very handsome address to the emperor, and was about to take his leave, when Theodosius exclaimed, "What, do you take no notice of my son? Do you not know that I have made him partner with me in the empire?" Upon this, the good old bishop went up to the young Arcadius, and putting his hand on his head, said, "The Lord bless thee, my son!" The

emperor, roused into a rage at this apparent neglect, exclaimed, "What! is this all the respect you pay to a prince I have made of equal dignity with myself?" Upon this, the bishop, with the grandeur of an angel and the zeal of an apostle, looking the emperor full in the face, indignantly said, "Sire, do you so highly resent my apparent neglect of your son, because I do not give him equal honors with yourself! And what must the eternal God think of you, who have given leave to have His co-equal and co-eternal Son degraded in His proper dignity in every part of your empire?"—*Baxendale quoted in the Sunday School Illustrator.*

THE FACT OF THE CROSS

Jesus would not have His death come upon His disciples unannounced. He began at this time, nearly a year before He was led to Calvary, to prepare them for the tragical and significant event. He built His death into His teaching. It was neither an accident nor an incident. During these closing months He pushed it to the front. They were to become accustomed to the cross before it was lifted up. The death of Jesus stands as a reality in our thinking. Without it there is no Gospel of redemption, no sins forgiven, no hope revived. That was the one event toward which the course of the life of Jesus moved.

THE LAW OF THE CROSS

This is the theme of our lesson: "The Law of the Cross." As we cannot think of the atoning work of Jesus Christ without the cross, neither can we think of the place we are to have in His cause without the cross we are to bear. There is a cross for every one, and there is a cross for me. We find the cross in the irritations, the cares, the burdens and the persecutions that come to us; but we see it even more in our case in renouncing sin and self, and in the denial of those appetites, lusts, worldly ambitions which are inconsistent with the higher life that Christ came to make available to us. In short the law of the cross is the law that puts us where we can serve others best, and where we can enjoy the abundant life we may have in Jesus Christ. It is a mistake for us to imagine that the cross implies everything that is unpleasant. There is deep joy to be found in carrying it. There is certainly no class of people happier than Christians. The men who refuse to carry the cross that Jesus would lay on them do not find the motive, the satisfaction, the rich experiences, and the fruitage in life that come to those who take up their cross and follow Him.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

What question led Jesus to deliver a discourse on the importance of the little child? What are some of the attributes of the little child which adults may worthily imitate? Name a few of the obstacles which it is possible for those who are responsible for the training of the children to place in their way. What sacrament is it that introduces both children and adults into the kingdom of God? What advantages have children in Christian lands that those born in other lands do not have? What makes character training in childhood so exceedingly important?

PALM SUNDAY

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 18:1-14; 19:13-15. (Print 18:1-6, 12-14; 19:13-15.)

(American Standard Revision Text)

18:1. In that hour came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

2. And he called to him a little child, and set him in the midst of them,

3. and said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven.

4. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

5. And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me:

6. But whoso shall cause one of these little ones that believe on me to stumble, it is profitable for him that a great millstone should be hanged about his neck, and *that* he should be sunk in the depth of the sea.

12. How think ye? if any man have

a hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and go unto the mountains, and seek that which goeth astray?

13. And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth over it more than over the ninety and nine which have not gone astray.

14. Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.

19:13. Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should lay his hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them.

14. But Jesus said, Suffer the little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for to such belongeth the kingdom of heaven.

15. And he laid his hands on them, and departed thence.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Suffer the little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for to such belongeth the kingdom of heaven.—Matthew 19:14.

LESSON GOAL.—To come to an understanding of the attitude of Jesus toward the children, and of their relationship to the kingdom, and of our responsibility for their spiritual nurture.

LESSON PLAN

I. UNDERSTANDING THE CHILDREN. (18:1-6.)

1. Humility and a Sense of Dependence.
2. A Proud and Ambitious Spirit.

II. CARING FOR THE CHILDREN. (18:7-14.)

1. Removing Stumbling-blocks.
2. Sacrificing for Them.
3. Of More Value Than Many Sheep.

III. BRINGING THE CHILDREN TO JESUS. (19:13-15.)

1. Room in the Kingdom for Them.
2. Their Fitness for the Kingdom.
3. Jesus' Love for Them.

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

Verse 6: *He should be sunk in the depth of the sea.*—This was a method of capital punishment not unusual among the Syrians, and the Greeks and Romans as well.

Verse 10: *See that ye despise not one of these little ones.*—Among the Greeks and Romans the practice of leaving their young children

to perish by the public highways was not considered a crime. In Sparta, a father, according to their law, was obliged to carry his newborn babe to the authorities for inspection. If it seemed to measure up to their standards he was permitted to keep it, but if not, it was put to death.

Verse 12: *And one of them be gone astray.*—A very intimate relationship exists between the shepherd and his sheep. When the sheep are brought together the absence of one is felt immediately. The whole appearance of the flock is changed. This knowledge is so reliable that counting is often dispensed with.

19:13: *Brought unto him little children that he should lay his hands on them, and pray.*—The blessing of a great rabbi, a prophet or a venerable man possessed great value among the Jews. According to the Talmud young children were brought to the synagogue for this purpose.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

We are able to get the geographical and historical location of this lesson by returning to the preceding chapter, 17:24, where we read, "And when they were come to Capernaum." Jesus and His disciples, after their stay at Cæsarea Philippi where Peter made his great confession, and their visit to the mountain where Jesus was transfigured before them, came back to Capernaum, His last visit to this city which had become His home.

Capernaum on the lake had been an advantageous center for the evangelistic activities of our Lord. The plains around the lake were crowded with cities and villages, and its shores teemed with life, so that He had unusual opportunities for carrying on His ministry. More than that it was rather centrally located, so that with least inconvenience to Himself He could make tours north, east, south and west; and within a short radius He was able to reach multitudes of people.

Our Lord was about to leave Capernaum never to return to it again. His work in Galilee was at an end. He was soon to start upon what is known as the Perea ministry. His labors in Galilee had been very fruitful. Some opposition had developed, it is true; but it was never as formidable as in Judea. Eleven of His apostles came from Galilee, and by far the most of His disciples hailed from that province.

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

UNDERSTANDING THE CHILDREN

18:1-6. The delivery of the discourse in which the child figures so largely was occasioned by the inquiry of the disciples as to who should be greatest in the kingdom. What Jesus had said at Cæsarea Philippi and on the mountain led them to understand more clearly than before that He intended to establish a kingdom. It was not at all unnatural that they should think of themselves in relation to that kingdom. But the thought of their own place and advancement was so much to the front as to set their conception of greatness in direct opposition to that of their Lord. With them greatness meant station, power and wealth; with Him it meant dependence, humility, service.

In order to make the lesson He would teach them more emphatic He took a child and set him in the midst, and said, "You must turn and change your thought and ways; you are faced in the wrong direction. You can never attain greatness the way you are going after it. Culti-

vate the childlike spirit which takes little account of personal elevation over others."

We are not left to ourselves to determine what Jesus meant by the spirit of the child. There has been forced into His saying much more than He intended should be there. In verse four He interprets it to be synonymous with humility. There is much in the child we have grown out of, let us hope. As Paul said, "I have put away childish things." We have advanced far beyond the child's ignorance, weakness, fickleness, and the like. But the child's qualities of humility, simplicity, transparency, these let us imitate.

Jesus went a step further and declared that those who have the childlike spirit, which is the Christlike spirit, will not be indifferent to the care and training of the child. So near do these little ones stand to Jesus and of such infinite worth are they in His sight that the true disciple will take the attitude toward them that Jesus took, which is one of love, protection, and care. If we have the heart that struggles to be great as Jesus thought of greatness, we shall not despise one of these little ones, whether that term be used of children or of weak and immature believers. We bring on ourselves the judgment of God if we so influence a child that he misses the right way, or his life is caused to be blighted by sin.

CARING FOR THE CHILDREN

18:7-14. While it would not be in accord with the best canons of interpretation to limit these verses to the wrongs that grow out of worldly ideas of greatness, at the same time we must keep them in mind. All the sins that are hinted at here may easily issue from the spirit of pride, jealousy and false ambition.

Offenses will come. Jesus did not escape them, neither shall we. But they come through the weakness and deliberate wrongdoing of some one. May His disciples be guilty of them? He says they may. While they are ambitious for their own preferment they are not going to take much account of the child or any one else.

What course is the Christian to pursue? The adoption of the policy of severe self-discipline which will place the rights and welfare of others at least on a level with his own. His desire to advance the interests of the kingdom must be so strong that he is willing to sacrifice the most precious possession, such as a hand or a foot, in order to bring it about. How valuable is the eye! And yet it would be far better for us to pluck it out and go through all the rest of our days without the use of it, than to cause anyone to be lost or be lost ourselves for no higher consideration than a momentary gratification. Likeness to the mind of Christ and loyalty to the will of Christ must be put first by His disciples. Where there is a man actuated by a self-seeking spirit you will find about him those who are directed in the way that leads downward.

Jesus goes on to declare that our attitude toward the children is to be one that involves a deep sense of responsibility for the reason that

they are very dear to the Father in heaven. The angels that stand closest to the Father are those who are appointed to protect the goings of these little ones. He is not careless of them, neither should we be.

To drive the truth home He spoke a parable, one of His favorites, for He had much to say about the shepherd and his sheep. No matter how many sheep a man may have, he is solicitous of each one. This is demonstrated by what he will do for the one that is lost. He does not say, "I shall not bother about it; I still have ninety-nine in the fold." Instead, he leaves those that are safe and exposes himself to all sorts of danger, the steep precipice, the wild beast, the fierce elements, nor eats nor sleeps, until he has found the one that is lost. That is what a shepherd will do. Is not a child of more value than a sheep? Jesus thought so, and we must think so too, for they are immortal spirits and hold in their hands the future of the world. The heavenly Father has many children, but it is not His will that one of them shall perish.

BRINGING THE CHILDREN TO JESUS

19:13-15. In all lands it has been the wish of parents to have the hands of great leaders and teachers placed on the heads of their children. There may have been a special reason why in this case they desired to have Jesus lay His hand on their heads. They must have been assured of the impartation of a blessing.

Partly because of their failure to esteem the worth of the child, and partly because they felt this intrusion would interfere with the regular work of Jesus, the disciples proceeded to object. These children, they thought, will have time enough to investigate spiritual realities when they grow up. For the present they are too insignificant to engage the time that should be devoted elsewhere by Jesus.

Jesus was rightfully displeased. He rebuked the disciples who took it upon themselves to rebuke the parents. None were more welcome than the children, who were probably small enough to be carried in the arms of their mothers. If any persons are nearer the kingdom of God by nature than others it is the children. They are not yet guilty of the sins or committed to the wicked ways of hosts of adults. The Master did not intimate here that they are not corrupted with the same sin as ourselves; nor did He intend to deny the place of infant baptism. He meant to claim for the children the right to all the spiritual privileges of the kingdom of heaven. He proclaimed His love for them; He insisted that there is room in the kingdom for them; and He rebuked all opposition or indifference that would keep them from Him.

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

THE MEANEST THING IN THE WORLD

What is the meanest thing in the world? Perhaps we cannot decide that question. It is not necessary that we shall. We have no desire here other than to get before us the thought that from the number of times Jesus rebuked the proud, the selfish, the haughty and the overbearing

spirit He must have believed that sin to be about the most prevalent and the hardest in the world to conquer. It has often been observed that a self-seeking person will stoop to almost anything to accomplish his ends. We cannot gainsay the fact that our Lord regarded this spirit incompatible with the ruling principle of His kingdom. And it is not glorified when it is found among those who profess His name. The passion for worldly greatness not alone keeps us from rendering good service in the kingdom, it is in danger of keeping us out of the kingdom altogether.

THE QUALITIES OF CHILDREN

We have to be very careful here. Children very early give expression to budding vices. They can be stubborn, and jealous, and proud, and angry, and resentful. Our minds are quickly disabused of the belief that they are innocent, and incapable of harboring thoughts that are wrong. But we are in the habit of associating a humble and trustful spirit with children. They take no account of the fact that their playmates live in better homes, or enjoy more comforts, or have skin of a different color from their own. They think of their playmates as equals, no matter how worldly standards may classify them.

CHRISTIANITY AND THE CHILDREN

The extent of the blessing of the religion of Jesus to childhood is unmeasurable. One of the last things the pagan nations learn is the value of childhood. The childhood of Jesus has sanctified childhood everywhere. From the beginning the child has been given a central place in Christian thinking. The Jews had done much along this line, but it remained for Christianity to complete the task.

In Sparta, and in some of the other Greek cities, in Rome, and among savage tribes, it was the custom to destroy small and unhealthy children as soon as they were born. Christianity put an end to all that. Byron was born with a club-foot; Spinoza was weak; Samuel Johnson was disfigured; Sir Isaac Newton was so small that he could have been put into a quart measure; Goethe and Victor Hugo were so weak that they were not expected to live; Charles Sumner weighed but three pounds and a half; Descartes, Gibbon, Kepler, Lord Nelson, Christopher Wren, James Watt, John Howard, Washington Irving, Wilberforce, were characterized by bodily weakness in infancy. Christianity saved them from the fate that would have been theirs if they had been born in the cities I have named before the Christian Era.—*Dr. David Gregg.*

THE LIFE THAT OFFENDS

All of us carry an influence with us. No man lives to himself. One, or two, or a dozen are following in our tracks. It makes all the difference in the world how we live. There are business men who expect boys and girls in their employ to misrepresent, deceive, lie. To any protest they reply, "It's business. Everybody is doing it." What will that example do to the growing life of a boy or girl? I heard the other day

of a man, quite over fifty, who led his future son-in-law to violate the pledge he made his mother long ago by persuading him to take a drink of whiskey. This lesson has something to say about a millstone, and the whole matter is a most serious one. The practice of exploiting childhood for financial ends calls for severe condemnation. Movies, pictures, magazines and books demand wise and careful censoring. What are children after awhile but the resultant of influences that have broken upon their lives? We are not called upon to neglect any period of life, but the one that Jesus stressed above all others is the period of childhood.

THIS GENERATION AND THE NEXT

No one can be found to dispute the statement that each generation is responsible for the manners and the morals of the one succeeding it. That is why we hear it said the most serious aspect of the child and youth problem is the adult problem. Give us a generation of adults who fear God and love and serve Him with all their heart, and we shall do more to give direction to oncoming generations than can be accomplished with all the power, all the money and all the education in the world. The carelessness, the indifference, the questionings, and the positive unbelief of parents can never be counted on to give to the world sons and daughters who will walk in the narrow way and enter in at the strait gate.

THE MEMORY OF CHILDHOOD

In the State Prison of Virginia there is an old man. He does not know his own age. All the officers now in charge found him there when they came. The prison has become his home. He has no regular work. If offered a pardon he has no place to go. For the rest of his life he is really better off there than he would be anywhere else. One touching story is told of him. A few years ago the surgeon in charge took the old man out to the State Fair. Dressing him up in a citizen's coat, he took him about the fair grounds and showed him all the wonderful things that would be likely to be new and attractive to the old man—the new machinery, the acrobats, the fine cattle, the side shows and the rest. Then after a full day he took the "shut in" back within the grim walls of the prison. What do you suppose was the story that the old man had to tell? When the men gathered around to hear what he had seen, this old "hardened" prisoner said: "Boys, they let me sit down by a little child." Ah, the memories of age! Ah, the powers of a child's life! They let me sit down by a little child.—*The Heidelberg Teacher*.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

How would you account for the fact that the disciples did not believe Jesus would rise from the dead? What are some of the evidences they did not believe it? What conditions prevailed at the tomb when the women arrived?

Who were the first to scatter the news of the resurrection? Was there a disposition to believe or disbelieve the announcement? How does your answer bear on the confirmation of the statement of the angel: "He is not here; he is risen"? What led Peter and John to believe? How was Mary's faith strengthened?

EASTER DAY

LESSON TEXT: John 20: 1-16.

(American Standard Revision Text)

1. Now on the first *day* of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, while it was yet dark, unto the tomb, and seeth the stone taken away from the tomb.

2. She runneth therefore, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we know not where they have laid him.

3. Peter therefore went forth, and the other disciple, and they went toward the tomb.

4. And they ran both together: and the other disciple outran Peter, and came first to the tomb;

5. and stooping and looking in, he seeth the linen cloths lying; yet entered he not in.

6. Simon Peter therefore also cometh, following him, and entered into the tomb; and he beholdeth the linen cloths lying,

7. and the napkin, that was upon his head, not lying with the linen cloths, but rolled up in a place by itself.

8. Then entered in therefore the other disciple also, who came first to the tomb, and he saw, and believed.

9. For as yet they knew not the

scripture, that he must rise again from the dead.

10. So the disciples went away again unto their own home.

11. But Mary was standing without at the tomb weeping: so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb;

12. and she beholdeth two angels in white sitting, one at the head, and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.

13. And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.

14. When she had thus said, she turned herself back, and beholdeth Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus.

15. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou hast borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.

16. Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turneth herself, and saith unto him in Hebrew, Rabboni; which is to say, Teacher.

GOLDEN TEXT.—He is not here; for he is risen.—Matthew 28: 6.

LESSON GOAL.—To see in this ancient record how a number of disciples came to believe that Jesus had risen, and how our faith rests not on a dead but on a living Saviour.

LESSON PLAN

I. MARY VISITS THE TOMB. (20: 1, 2.)

1. What She Finds.
2. What She Reports.

II. PETER AND JOHN INVESTIGATE THE TOMB. (20: 3-10.)

1. What They See.
2. How It Affects Their Faith.

III. JESUS' FIRST APPEARANCE. (20: 11-16.)

1. To a Seeking Woman.
2. To a Weeping Woman.

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

Verse 1: *Unto the tomb*.—Outside the city of Jerusalem, along the hillsides may be seen many caverns which are used as burial places.

Some are natural, others artificial caves. It was the custom for people to prepare tombs for themselves and families.

Verse 1: *Seeth the stone taken away.*—A round stone, similar to a millstone, only much larger, in an upright position, is rolled against the opening. In opening the tomb it is necessary to roll this stone back; and since the ground is always lower at the door than at the sides it is easier to close than to open.

Verse 5: *And stooping and looking in.*—All the tombs in Palestine, whether crude and simple or finished in their workmanship, have a small, low entrance, so that one must stoop low to enter. The room may be a large rock-hewn chamber with the tombs cut on each side where bodies could be laid.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

Jesus had told His disciples many times that He would rise from the dead. Indeed He spoke of it almost as often as He did of His death. We know how difficult it was for them to believe that He would die. They had so set their minds both on His power and purpose to establish a temporal kingdom that they believed His death would mean the defeat of all His ambitions. To the very last they clung to the notion that He would reign on the earth much as the emperors of Rome had done.

Still it is a wonder that after He had been nailed to the cross and laid away in the tomb they did not reconsider His sayings about dying and rising again and come to entertain some hope at least that all was not lost. We are forced to admit, however, that they were as sheep without a shepherd, a people without a head. They let fall to the ground all they held dear. They were ready to go back several years and take up their old duties again where they had laid them down, the nets and the custom office.

When Jesus was dead a friend asked that he might have the body. Permission was granted. It was taken, hastily anointed and placed in the tomb of a rich man, Joseph of Arimathea. The tomb was sealed and a guard stationed near it. Early Sunday morning the tomb was empty. Angels said Jesus had risen. It was hard to believe. But the risen Lord showed Himself alive by many infallible proofs. The disciples believed, and gave their lives for that faith.

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

This lesson does not belong to the regular course, but is introduced here so that we might have an Easter study. We cannot pass by an event so wonderful as the resurrection of our Lord without pausing to meditate upon it and to rejoice in the message it always has for us.

MARY VISITS THE TOMB

20: 1, 2. The last chapter of Matthew, of Mark and of Luke provides the parallel accounts of the mighty miracle of the resurrection. Even with all the accounts we are not able to piece together a continuous and unbroken story. But the evangelists were little caring to produce all the facts, or to give them in order. What they sought to do was to marshal the evidence so that none could doubt that their Lord had come back from the dead.

There were other women than Mary Magdalene at the tomb early that Sunday morning. They may have joined her after she had arrived there. John, our writer, may desire to set before us the steps by which

she and John and Peter came to believe that Jesus had risen. For that reason he brings no others into the picture.

The women had come to anoint the body of Jesus more perfectly than time permitted it to be done Friday evening. They had no thought of His resurrection. How to roll away the stone and get at His body had worried them. They found the stone rolled away and the tomb empty. John omits reference to the conversation the women had with the angels as they stood amazed at what their eyes beheld.

Mary at first suspected that the body of Jesus had been taken away by friends and laid in another tomb, or that the grave had been despoiled by enemies. The most natural thing for her to do was to run and tell His disciples what she had seen. She located Peter and John and told them that the tomb was empty. But she did not intimate she believed He had risen. She thought His body had been taken away. The use of the word "we" would imply that there were other women with her.

PETER AND JOHN INVESTIGATE THE TOMB

The details of the visit of Peter and John are found in this gospel only. They are presented with all the vividness and exactness of an eyewitness. Curious to know what had happened they hastened toward Joseph's garden. John being at least several years younger than Peter outran him and came to the tomb first. But he halted on the outside, held there by a mingled sense of reverence and fear. Even from that position he had no difficulty confirming the report Mary had brought them.

But Peter was not so cautious. For boldness he was true to his nature. He stooped and entered by the low doorway into the hollowed vault in the side of which there had been cut out of the rock a niche that had held the body of Jesus. The tomb was empty, save for the linen clothes which arrested the attention of the two disciples. It was customary to bind a napkin about the head and grave-clothes about the body of the dead preparatory to burial. These were not tossed about as they would have been had the grave been robbed. They were in order, as though the body had simply slipped out of them, just as a glove might retain its form and shape after the hand is withdrawn.

The orderliness of the grave-clothes made its impression on both Peter and John, and sufficiently deep was that impression on the latter that he then and there believed that the body had not been hastily snatched away as by robbers, but that the Lord had risen. Our writer does not say that much of Peter. Perhaps the facts were convincing to him too, but his state was somewhat different because of his denial of Jesus; and he needed a visit of the risen Lord in order that he might have full assurance. (Luke 24:34.)

But does it not seem strange indeed that such a simple thing as the position of the grave-clothes could bring faith to the minds of these men, while the references to the resurrection in the Old Testament and the frequent sayings of Jesus to the effect that He would rise from the dead made almost no impression on them? Having investigated the

tomb thoroughly, and being satisfied that it had not been plundered, they returned to their lodging quarters in the city.

JESUS' FIRST APPEARANCE

Mary returned to the tomb after she had borne the news to the two disciples, but more slowly, possibly arriving after they had departed. While she was to experience the great joy of having the Lord appear to her first, she was not the first to believe He had risen. She remained on the outside of the tomb also, not having the example of the impulsive Peter to lead her in. But she stooped down and looked in; and as she did so she beheld two angels tenanted the tomb and they were strangely close to the niche in which the body of Jesus had lain.

Her eyes were filled with tears, not so much just now that He was dead, but that she could not locate His body. Peter and John saw no angels, only the grave-clothes, which were sufficient proof to them. But for her benefit angels came. Even they did not disturb or distract her. Her mind was on something else. And she turned from them to give heed to footsteps behind her, or to leave the tomb in search of the body of her lost friend. She had no sooner turned than she was accosted by a figure. Her eyes being blinded with tears and not expecting to see Jesus, she failed to recognize Him. Perhaps His body was different in form. She thought it was the gardener, the keeper of the plot of ground in which the tomb was located. She suspected that Joseph may have given instructions to him to remove the body elsewhere for safety. At least there would be no other person more likely to know of its whereabouts than he.

The risen Saviour opened the conversation. His first words were identical with those spoken by the angels. But He went further and said: "Whom seekest thou?" It was a person and not a body that He wanted her to think of. How was it that she did not know it was He from this part of the conversation? A little later we are to see that she identified Him through the way He pronounced one word. Why did she not catch that tone in His questions? At any rate it had not yet dawned on her that it was her Lord.

Not until He had evidence that her thought went no further than His dead body did He reveal Himself to her. She wanted to locate that form of Him which she had seen placed hurriedly in the tomb two days before. She had no present hope beyond that. But the veil that had shut out her Lord from her had begun to vanish, and when He called her by name she recognized Him. He had uttered it so often during those few years she had ministered to Him that the instant He spoke it she knew Him. And that moment too He had again become her loving friend, and more, her risen Lord.

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

PUNCTUALITY

A writer wisely remarks, "Mary Magdalene, if a member of a church in the twentieth century, would not come straggling in Sunday morning

five or ten minutes after the service had begun. When men and women are alert, punctual, wide-awake and aggressive six days a week, and sluggards on the Sabbath, it is because they have a poor brand of religious life." She came to the tomb very early, while it was yet dark, when not many people were astir, and she started a procession of curious, eager persons in the direction of Joseph's garden. It is not a little to her credit to have done that.

IF CHRIST WERE TAKEN AWAY

Perhaps it is only those who have known Christ as a friend who can begin to appreciate what it would mean to lose Him. Mary had spent much time with Him. She had come to think of Him as one of the essentials of her life; yea, the essential. When He had slipped from her, or she thought He had, the day seemed like night to her. Her outlook on life was radically changed. We are not in the least surprised at her feeling. We know how we feel when we lose an earthly friend. Life holds for us an awful emptiness. God has given us the capacity for friendship, and the heart is lonesome without Jesus, who is the best of all friends. The voice of those nearest us and the visit of angels may be very precious, but they cannot take His place.

ABUNDANT WITNESSES

If we are looking for witnesses to the resurrection of our Lord we shall have no difficulty finding them. One thing that strikes us in this record is its lack of artificiality. It is so natural and human. There is no trace of the fiction writer. It is impossible to locate anything that is manufactured for the occasion, or that has been added to create effect. We see men and women who are dejected because they have no sense of the reality of Christ, moving slowly in the direction of faith, and ultimately coming into possession of a living and unconquerable conviction. The record satisfies every desire of the reader after nineteen centuries, and makes him glad that back yonder Jesus found devious ways of moving into the hearts of simple-minded folk.

HE IS NOT HERE

So spoke the angels to the holy women. The words might have meant much or little, depending on how one looks at them. If they had contained nothing more than the information that His body had been removed to another sepulchre for safer keeping there would have been no comfort in them for the woe-begone disciples. We know, however, that they were the prelude to the bold and positive affirmation, "He is risen." They threw the first flash of light on the weary and darksome path of His humble followers, who, in a little while, were to rejoice together in the consciousness of a living Lord.

"Oh, mother, I am so disappointed! You told me something beautiful would come out of that brown thing I picked up, and today when I looked at it I found a hole in it and only an empty skin left.

"Ah, my child, you have looked for the beautiful thing in the

wrong place. Come with me." She took her boy back to the room, and there, close to the glass of the window, basking in the warmth of the sun, was a beautiful butterfly. The boy had looked in the wrong place.

"A poor widow was constantly to be seen hovering about the entrance to a coal mine, where her two boys had been killed, sometimes clasping her hands over her head, at other times kneeling and crying, "Where shall I find them, Oh tell me." One day a servant of Christ heard her, and, gently leading her from the spot, directed her thoughts to the risen Christ. 'You have made a mistake in going to that mine and crying; look at the right place and you will find them. Christ is not to be found in the empty tomb; He is risen.'"—*Sunday School Chronicle*.

DEATH AND THE GRAVE DESTROYED

Death and the grave have been full of terrors to man. They have blocked his way and told him that after a few years he would fall and all his powers suffer a shock like the tree that comes crashing to the ground. His happiest moments were darkened by the thought that he was that much nearer the end of the journey. But something has happened to change all that. Christ came to destroy death and to rob the tomb of its terrors. That victory was not for Himself alone. It is for every child of Adam. He came to make His blessings flow far as the curse is found. The grave is no longer to be thought of as a terminal; it is a station in the life that has no ending. It is a common error with us that we look too much at death and the grave; whereas we should be looking at life and the home beyond.

CHRIST IS HERE

I do not want that we shall let our minds stay back with the disciples on that first Easter day. That was a glorious day to be sure. For our faith we are dependent on what they saw and published abroad. But at the present time Christ is not back there; He is here. He lives in this century and in this land. What a mistake to suppose that historic Christianity ended when Jesus ascended into heaven! That is when it really began. He died, and arose, and ascended, that His presence and power might be unlimited. He left His disciples and went away into heaven that He might come nearer to man than it would ever have been possible as long as He remained in the flesh. If He is risen He is alive. If He is alive His operations now transcend the things we can see and touch. He wills to establish His kingdom on spiritual foundations. He is nearer us than he was to Mary, Peter and John.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

What important question was asked Jesus in regard to eternal life? Why do you suppose Jesus gave the answer He did, saying, "Keep the commandments?" When the young man said he had observed all of them, what form of observance had he in mind? What was the particular sin that held him back? How may riches be an enemy of all that is best in life? How may they be a friend? When may it be said that a man has given up all for the kingdom?

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 19: 1-29. (Print verses 16-26.)
(American Standard Revision Text)

16. And behold, one came to him and said, Teacher what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?

17. And he said unto him, Why ask-
est thou me concerning that which is
good? One there is who is good: but
if thou wouldest enter into life, keep
the commandments.

18. He saith unto him, Which? And
Jesus said, Thou shalt not kill, Thou
shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt
not steal, Thou shalt not bear false
witness,

19. Honor thy father and thy
mother; and, Thou shalt love thy
neighbor as thyself.

20. The young man saith unto him,
All these things have I observed: what
lack I yet?

21. Jesus said unto him, If thou
wouldest be perfect, go, sell that which
thou hast, and give to the poor, and

thou shalt have treasure in heaven:
and come, follow me.

22. But when the young man heard
the saying, he went away sorrowful;
for he was one that had great posses-
sions.

23. And Jesus said unto his dis-
ciples, Verily I say unto you, It is
hard for a rich man to enter into the
kingdom of heaven.

24. And again I say unto you, It
is easier for a camel to go through
a needle's eye, than for a rich man to
enter into the kingdom of God.

25. And when the disciples heard it,
they were astonished exceedingly, say-
ing, Who then can be saved?

26. And Jesus looking upon *them*
said to them, With men this is impos-
sible; but with God all things are pos-
sible.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.—Matthew 6: 20.

LESSON GOAL.—To consider on the basis of the teaching of Jesus the relation of
our possessions to the kingdom of God.

LESSON PLAN

I. SEEKING LIFE. (19: 16, 17.)

1. A Universal Quest.
2. Not by Good Works.
3. The Source of All Good.

II. KEEPING THE COMMANDMENTS. (19: 18-20.)

1. Negatively: In the Letter.
2. Positively: In the Spirit.

III. THE LURE OF RICHES. (19: 21-26.)

1. Treasures on Earth.
2. Treasures in Heaven.

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

Verse 18: *Which?*—According to the teachings of the Jewish rabbis
there were six hundred and thirteen precepts in the law, not all of equal
importance.

Verse 23: *It is hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of
heaven.*—Because of his greater earthly privileges the rich Jew felt
certain of a place in the heavenly kingdom. His assurance of divine
favor was considered above that of the poor man.

Verse 24: *It is easier for a camel.*—The common proverb which

Jesus used was not difficult for the Oriental to understand, accustomed as he has always been to exaggerated speech.

An explanation sometimes given is that rural natives, among whom Jesus lived the larger part of his time, speak of the smaller gate, cut into the larger one, and which can be entered at hours when the great gates are closed, as the needle's eye.

There being no carts in Palestine, camels and donkeys are the beasts of burden, carrying large sacks of wheat, barley, charcoal or wood into the city. The burdens stand out sometimes three or four feet on either side so that a laden camel can not pass through the needle's eye without being relieved of its burden and passing through on its knees.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

We are now concluding our studies in the fourth of a six months' course in Matthew. Unless our attention is called to the fact we might not realize that we are within one month of the crucifixion of our Lord. Matthew devotes eight of his twenty-eight chapters, or more than one-fourth, to the last week of Jesus' earthly life. It is for that reason we ordinarily spend from one-fourth to one-third of our time in any of the gospels to the closing scenes of our Lord's ministry. The time of our lesson today is surely near the close of the Perea ministry, or only a short while prior to the triumphal entry.

There are those who profess to see a close connection between the three incidents recorded in the nineteenth chapter of this gospel, from which our lesson is taken. These three incidents are the question of divorce, the question of the child, and the question of money. Possibly these do not stand here in the order in which Christ delivered them; still they may. Only we know that Matthew does not always follow the chronological order. At any rate Matthew must have some reason for placing them in the order in which we have them.

Jesus had some very definite things to say in regard to the sacredness of the marriage bond, and the sinfulness of divorce. He was just as outspoken on the question of the importance and the place of the little child. Certainly the inviolate character of the marriage relationship and the worth of the child are as closely related as any two themes can be. And who will say that the way money is acquired and used does not have a most important bearing on the preservation or the dissolution of the home?

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

SEEKING LIFE

19:16, 17. Putting the three accounts together, Matt. 19, Mark 10, and Luke 18, we get a full-sized portrait of the "one" who came to Jesus, asking the way to eternal life. We find that he was young, that he was a ruler, that he was rich, that he came running to Jesus, and that he reverently fell down at his feet. So many people came to our Saviour, seeking answers to important questions, who turned out to be hypocrites and desired nothing else than to catch Him in His words, that we instantly ask whether this young man belonged to that group. We answer emphatically, *no*. Every line in the several accounts proves him to have been thoroughly sincere. We see his earnestness in the manner in which he ran and fell at the feet of the Lord. His heart cried out for something he knew he did not possess. His case represents an innate longing of the soul of man in all ages and climes.

He was a ruler. That is, he was one of the rulers of the synagogue.

"The 'decemvirate' of the synagogue were chosen from 'men of leisure', who were free from the necessity of labor, and could devote themselves to the duties of the synagogue, and to study; of these the first three were called 'Rulers of the Synagogue.'"—*Cambridge Bible*. The synagogue was a religious center, a court of justice, and an educational institution. This young man was, therefore, a civil, educational and religious official, and a leader in his community. The weakness of the Jewish religion of that day was its cold formalism, and consequently its inability to satisfy the inner longings of the human soul.

His question of Jesus shows that his conception of religion was true to what he had been taught. "The rich man is at the old legal standpoint—that he has to *do* something, not that he has to *be* something. Yet it is a step in advance that he recognizes that mere abstention from transgression is not enough."

Jesus' reply in verse 17 is not easy to explain. This much may be said. Our Lord was aware that the suppliant thought of Him as a good teacher, a good man, and nothing more. He did not enter with him into the discussion of that question. Instead He referred him to God the ultimate source of all good, and asked him to consider the absolute goodness that is the attribute of God, and to measure himself by that standard. Men at best are only comparatively good, but God is perfectly, absolutely good. Then, too, goodness is first of all in character, in what one is, to be expressed, to be sure, in what one does. Now the question is, Can this young man, or anyone, so keep the commandments as to approximate this goodness which we find in God who gave them?

KEEPING THE COMMANDMENTS

19:18-20. It might seem strange to us that Jesus referred the young ruler to the commandments as the way to eternal life. But what He hoped to accomplish was to get him to see how far short he had come of living a righteous life. By the law is the knowledge of sin. More, it is the schoolmaster to lead us to Christ. He was far from teaching that a man can be saved by his good works. Observe that to the second table of the law Jesus added the commandment of love. That went to the heart of the matter.

The young man was not conscious of transgressing any of the commandments, but should he have done so he was willing to have the infraction pointed out to him. Of course the difference between the viewpoint of Jesus and that of the ruler was a vast one; the former thought of observance as inner and spiritual, the latter as outward and formal. And yet the young man was beginning to move away from his position. He had in one way or another been attached to the synagogue for a long time, and it had failed to give him peace of heart. His conscience told him there was something he lacked. He had tried everything the Pharisaical system had to offer, and without avail.

"Have I not yet fulfilled all my duty to God? What is my spiritual want which yet remains, as Thou impliest by Thy words and looks, and

which my heart now begins to feel? This dawning of light in the young man's soul, which indistinctly revealed to him his spiritual poverty, and now awakened a desire to find God, explains the words in Mark 10:21: 'Jesus beholding him, loved him'—was greatly pleased with the feeble effort made by the young man, and felt great pity for him."—*The Lutheran Commentary*.

THE LURE OF RICHES

19:21-26. Here was a young man seeking eternal life. He would have to learn that nothing dare stand in the way of his quest. I think we can begin to see the reason for Jesus saying, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." What would be the young man's attitude toward his possessions if he had that kind of love? It is not likely he had made many persons happy and comfortable through his gifts. Our Lord in telling him to go and sell all he had did not primarily intend to give him something especially hard to do. Its sole object was to reveal to him his weakness and to point out to him the manner in which he could come to the place where he would be free to seek and find eternal life. He could not put anything else first in his thinking and service until he was willing to check his love for money which had become his passion.

"We must not overlook the fact, however, that the Lord's last word to him was not a charge but an invitation: 'Come, follow me.' We may reverently believe that the man's own good was not the sole motive for Christ's treatment of him. Jesus really wanted him, He saw in him the making of another apostle, a Barnabas if not a Paul; and he longed to have the strengthening of this lovable but weak character."—*Plummer*.

But the young man made the great refusal.

As our Lord saw the young man depart he was led to remark on the lure and peril of riches thus: "It is hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven." And then He added the proverb or parable about the camel and the needle's eye, which I believe should be taken literally. Otherwise it loses its point. To be sure a camel can never pass through the eye of a needle, neither can a man who puts his trust in riches enter into the kingdom of heaven. The one is as impossible as the other.

The Jews always believed that wealth was a sign of divine favor, and so the disciples expressed their surprise. And the more were they inclined to that belief since they thought of an earthly kingdom for the Master, which would be overflowing with treasures of all kinds.

The desire for worldly goods is almost insatiable, and cannot be broken by any power known to man; but by the grace of God the love of these things may be put in the background, while the love of Christ and the desire for the higher good become the passion of our lives.

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

GIVING UP ALL FOR THE KINGDOM

That, you will observe, is the theme of this lesson. And let us not evade the issue. We should face it squarely for the sake both of our

classes and of ourselves. There is not much settled for any of us until the stewardship question is settled. Until it is settled we cannot relate ourselves to Jesus Christ as we should. Until it is settled we shall not deal with our fellows as we should. It runs through all our doings. It colors all our thinking and acting. The problem of money and possessions is with us morning, noon and night. If it had to do only with our bread and butter we could dismiss it. But it has to do with every phase of life,—food, clothing, comfort, happiness, education, religion. We cannot dismiss it with a toss of the head.

GOD AND MAMMON

The trouble with the rich young ruler, as with most of us, was that he wanted to serve God *and* mammon, which Jesus once declared was an impossibility. He soon found it out for himself. He was forced to make choice between the two. He could put one first, but not both. How happy he would have been if he could have centered his affection on the two. He did not seem to think that the two were inconsistent with each other. His inordinate love of the things of this world left little room for the things of the higher life. That is always the case.

THE ACQUISITION OF WEALTH

One naturally asks whether it is possible for a man whose heart is set on this world's goods to deal in an absolutely honest manner with his fellows. Perhaps it is, but we venture the statement that it is not often done. Increasing riches have the power of hardening the heart so that the mere acquisition takes precedence to the way in which it is done.

Certainly we are safe in saying that the individual who makes it his aim to get more and more is not going to be generously disposed. It has sometimes been said of men who have become wealthy, without being particularly scrupulous as to how it was done, that they should be exonerated from any suspicion because they have now and then responded to appeals for good causes. Do you think any generosity can atone for dishonest bargaining?

THE PARALYZING POWER OF MONEY

"There is a strangely paralyzing power about money, and it so restricts the heart that the more we get the less we are inclined to give. And this is surely what the Lord was meaning when He spoke of 'the deceitfulness of riches.' Riches can make a man think he is growing bigger when all the time he is growing less. He estimates his size by the inlet of income, and not by the outlet of benevolence. While the inlet is expanding the outlet is contracting. But the deception is frequently more deadly still. His growth in riches is often accompanied by a corresponding growth in fear. It is one of the pathetic ironies of life that men who are growing in wealth have an increasing fear of poverty. And the fear puts them into bonds and they are afraid to give their treasure lest none should remain.

"I went to see a very wealthy man in New York to ask him to help an exceedingly noble cause. His fear immediately answered my appeal, and he spoke as one who was on the verge of poverty. 'I really cannot give any more.' The word was apparently sincere, and it was accompanied by a sort of sigh which confirmed its reality. 'I really cannot give any more. What with one thing and another I do not know what we are coming to.' Fear seemed to haunt the man. It determined his speech, his thought and his services. A few weeks later he died, and his will was proved at over sixty millions. And I wonder. I wonder if at the end of the day he heard the messenger of the Lord saying unto him, 'Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee, then whose shall these things be?'"—*Dr. J. H. Jowett.*

THE TITHE

I fear the tithing system has done many of us much harm. We seem to imagine that one-tenth is all that we must render an account of to God. Giving up all for the kingdom does not mean that we are to sell everything we have and give it to the poor and to those without the Gospel. Have you stopped to think that that may be the speediest way possible of pauperizing the poor and the dependent? We ought to give one-tenth at least to benevolence; but what about the nine-tenths? It is to be used in such a way that we may feel we are not squandering it, or spending it on ourselves in an unrestricted and unaccountable fashion. We must answer to God for it also. We are a nation of wasters. With astonishing prodigality we lavish mere things upon ourselves. If we love our neighbor as ourselves would we expend what we have any differently? Is it not true that in the Christian light of our social responsibility we must consecrate all we have to the furtherance of the kingdom of God?

THE RETURNS

Money in itself is non-moral. But it is a powerful instrument for good or ill. We can use it in such a way as to enrich our own lives and the lives of others, and at the same time lay up treasures in heaven. Neither riches nor poverty is in itself a sign of divine favor. Rich men have been wicked men, and poor men have been no better. Rich men and poor men alike have been enthusiastic supporters of the cause of righteousness. We do not need to handle large sums of money to be mighty servants of the King.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

Be prepared to tell in your own language the parable of the laborers in the vineyard. What do you think Jesus intended to teach His hearers by this parable?

What disquieting news did Jesus break to His disciples as they were on their way to Jerusalem? What part of it should have been good news?

What question did the mother of James and John ask Jesus? Why was it not in His power to grant what she requested? On what condition did He say they could have positions with Him in His kingdom? How did the ten feel about the desire of the two for places of prominence? What were Christ's standards of greatness?

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 19:30—20:28. (Print 20:17-28.)

(American Standard Revision Text)

20:17. And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples apart, and on the way he said unto them,

18. Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests and scribes; and they shall condemn him to death,

19. and shall deliver him unto the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify: and the third day he shall be raised up.

20. Then came to him the mother of the sons of Zebedee with her sons, worshipping *him*; and asking a certain thing of him.

21. And he said unto her, What wouldest thou? She saith unto him, Command that these my two sons may sit, one on thy right hand, and one on thy left hand, in thy kingdom.

22. But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink the cup that I am about to

drink? They say unto him, We are able.

23. He saith unto them, My cup indeed ye shall drink: but to sit on my right hand, and on *my* left hand, is not mine to give; but *it is for them* for whom it hath been prepared of my Father.

24. And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation concerning the two brethren.

25. But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.

26. Not so shall it be among you: but whosoever would become great among you shall be your minister;

27. and whosoever would be first among you shall be your servant:

28. even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

GOLDEN TEXT.—The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.—Matthew 20:28.

LESSON GOAL.—To show what, in the kingdom of God, true greatness is and how it is attained.

LESSON PLAN

I. STUDY OF SERVICE. (19:30—20:16.)

II. SUFFERING PREDICTED. (17-19.)

III. SELFISH AMBITION CURBED. (20-23.)

IV. STANDARD OF PROMOTION. (24-28.)

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

Verse 19: *To mock and to scourge and to crucify*.—The first meaning of *mocking* is to play with, to trifle with. Hence it came to mean to make fun of, to deride, to hold in contempt and to treat with insults. *Scourging* was a whipping with rods or lashes. For the Jews the number of stripes could not exceed forty (Deut. 25:3). So with a scourge having three lashes thirty-nine stripes would be inflicted with thirteen blows. Paul refers to this (2 Cor. 11:25). Roman scourging was not so limited. Fixing a criminal to a cross until he died was the practice of many ancient nations, such as Egypt, Persia, Assyria. Rome

used this method for capital punishment for slaves and outlaws, but not for Romans. The Jews used only stoning or the sword for capital punishment. Jesus foresaw that His death would be by the Roman method.

Verse 21: *One on thy right hand, and one on thy left hand.* These were positions of honor and authority in a kingdom. Near to the throne meant special favors and exceptional power. The highest honor a king could bestow was to grant the privilege of standing, or sitting, at his right hand. Jesus had spoken of twelve thrones; the two nearest Him would be reckoned as most honored.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

Jesus was nearing the end of His Perea ministry and was making His last journey to Jerusalem. Conscious of what awaited Him there He was desirous of having His disciples forewarned about coming events which would disturb them and throw them into doubt. He pictured to them a triumphant future, a kingdom with twelve thrones. Naturally there was ambition for choicest locations among these thrones. Hence the special request for, or by, James and John. They came to Jericho. Jesus healed the blind men, one of whom is named Bartimæus, a beggar. In Jericho Jesus visited Zacchæus, spoke the parable of the pounds and then started on to Jerusalem.

Ancient Jericho, being more than 800 feet below the level of the Mediterranean, had a tropical climate. The soil was rich. Palm trees flourished, giving to Jericho the name, "The City of Palms." It had been an important city for a long time prior to Jesus' day. Herod the Great had fortified the place and adorned it with magnificent palaces. He drew large revenues from it. It was the place of his death.

An archæologist has excavated in and around ancient Jericho. He tells us: "This early city was small. The whole of it could be put into the Colosseum at Rome. In the city was a citadel with a double wall. Each wall represented a different period of history. Both were built of brick, as were the houses of the time. The outer wall was between four and five feet thick and appeared to be older; the inner one was about ten feet thick."

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

Keeping in mind the story of the rich man who asked to do something to merit eternal life and the question of Peter, "What then shall we have?" as a setting for this lesson, will remove many difficulties of interpretation, especially of the parable of the laborers in the vineyard. Jesus was trying to teach His disciples the real basis for standing before God. His statements were intended primarily for His disciples.

STUDY OF SERVICE

19:30—20:16.—The parable illustrates the strange declaration about the last being first and the first last. It has to do with rewards for service, showing that these are not judged by quantity and are not determined by length of time but by attitude on the part of the servant.

The Palestinian system of employment was so different from ours that the details of the parable cannot fit into our ways of engaging and paying labor. The laborers referred to were not the regular servants,

but the men called in for temporary work to meet an emergency. Three types of men were engaged; one bargained, one went for a promised amount and the third went because asked.

The dispute that arose over the payment of all alike seems quite natural. The injustice of like treatment of all seems apparent. But Jesus was thinking in terms of the kingdom and He put a premium on willingness to work and met the complaint of the man who had borne the brunt of the day's work with the argument that he had received what he bargained for, and that he was not to hold a grudge if the master was generous. "In other words, justice is something less than justice, unless it is something more." This was a new principle, one that the disciples specially needed to learn.

"Be not as slaves that minister to their Lord with a view to receive recompense; but be as slaves that minister to their Lord without a view to receive recompense: and let the fear of heaven be upon you."—*Sayings of the Fathers*.

SUFFERING PREDICTED

17-19.—Undoubtedly this was the last journey of Jesus to Jerusalem. He was aware of what was in store for Him in the sacred city. It was on His mind, but it did not make Him unmindful of His disciples. He wanted them to be prepared for the shock that awaited them. He spoke to them privately, declaring for the third time His death. (Matt. 16: 21; 17: 22). With the intimacy of a friend He held nothing back from them, even the burden of His heart He allowed them to see and feel. True they did not comprehend His words at the time. It was after the dreadful events that they recalled His words and caught a glimpse of what He had tried to make them understand.

He went more into detail in this announcement of what was to happen. He told of His coming arrest, being in the hands of the Jewish rulers, being condemned by them to death, being turned over to the Gentiles who would do three things to Him: they would mock Him, scourge Him and crucify Him. Jesus followed this awful recital with the assurance of His resurrection on the third day. The disciples could not grasp His meaning; the facts were too impossible to their way of thinking. For them the resurrection was unintelligible.

What Jesus foretold was contrary to their expectation. They looked for the establishment of an earthly kingdom, and of course could not adjust even the possibility of His death with their fixed notion of a kingdom with Jesus as King. Probably they caught in His statement about being raised up on the third day nothing more than that after a period of conflict He would emerge victorious. Such, doubtless, was their confidence in Him.

SELFISH AMBITION CURBED

20-23. The determined expectation of an earthly kingdom persistently kept them from understanding Jesus' predictions about His death. They looked for a speedy realization of their hopes. Naturally the

question of precedence came up. If there were to be thrones, as Jesus said, they must be occupied, and it seemed reasonable that this honor would fall to His disciples. But there was a normal ambition for the thrones of highest relative honor. James and John already belonged to the "inner circle," being of the trio that had witnessed the special manifestations of Jesus' power and glory. In their request they did not include Peter. Matthew puts the request in the mouth of Salome, their mother, thus lessening the apparent reflection on the sons of Zebedee. Hers was a natural request for a mother to make. Jesus did not find fault with her, or the request. What He did show was that they completely misconceived His kingdom and misinterpreted His words.

They approached Him in true Oriental form, with due reverence, as a slave to his master or a subject to his ruler. Mark tells that they tried to get His promise before announcing their specific request. This He would not do, but demanded a statement of their petition. What was said to Him indicates that they attributed to Him full authority to distribute honors arbitrarily. He could select favorites and give them the best. His reply exposed their ignorance of His purposes, and asked for their own measure of their willingness to pay the price for honors. He used the figure of a "cup." It was not a banqueting cup, but the cup of suffering He had in mind, the cup He was already beginning to drain. They misjudged themselves as well as His meaning and daringly asserted their ability to go with Him all the way. Jesus predicted that they would drink the cup of suffering, but that rewards in the kingdom were not for Him to give as He chose, but were prepared for those who merited them and would be given by the Father. Their ambition had in it a note of selfishness, in that they hoped for unearned promotion.

STANDARD OF PROMOTION

24-28. Jesus had further opportunity to make clear His principles when the ten disciples became indignant over the request of James and John. Their resentfulness was natural, a thing to be expected. But Jesus knew that their ideas were colored by the social order of the day. He reviewed what that was. Gentile rulers used authority as an index of position, and the more their servants the greater they seemed. Jesus' plan was opposite to this. He made the mark of greatness to be willing service. The ranking commonly accepted was rulers, great ones, ministers, slaves, but Jesus reversed this order. "The higher the rank, the greater is to be the self-humiliation: of this the Son of Man is the supreme example." His mission was service, and service was His badge of greatness. The way to honor was a humble one; the standard of promotion was His own example.

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

KEEPING NOTHING BACK

Jesus concealed nothing from His disciples. He let them into the secrets of His future, even to its bitter sufferings. This was for their

good; they needed to be foretold so as to be prepared. That was involved in His calling them His friends. Friends want us to know the sad as well as the glad things about them. They expect our sympathy as well as our jollity; they look to us for assistance as well as companionship.

Jesus never deceived His followers. He did not promise them freedom from tests and strains by being with Him. He did not offer to provide everything for them without any cost on their part. They were to be servants, ministers, along with Him. They were to carry one end of the yoke. They were to go and teach and preach. They were to have their rewards after they had proved their worth.

AN UNEXPECTED QUESTION

There was graciousness in the question of Jesus to the eager mother of the sons of Zebedee. He encouraged her to say what she desired; His attitude was kind and inviting. His question was unexpected; it forced her to be definite before He would promise her anything. Generalities would not do; she must ask for this or that.

God's unexpected questions bring men face to face with personal searching and specific statements to God. "What is that in thy hand?" was directed to Moses. "What doest thou here?" was asked of Elijah. "Will ye also go away?" asked Jesus of His disciples. Unexpected questions demand facing God with the facts about our desires, our strength and weakness, and our relation to men and God.

A NATURAL AMBITION

That mother was just natural. Her sons were to her the best and most deserving. She could think of no other mother's sons. If there was to be a favored place in the new realm, her sons should have it. Why not? Their future was her chief desire. She had no thought of unfairness, but with maternal skill she aimed to utilize every possible advantage for her boys.

Maybe there is exemplary ambition here for all mothers to imitate. To be in an honored place near Christ in His kingdom is the highest desire a mother can have for her sons. Christian mothers have lifted their boys up to Jesus and He has received them gladly. Christian men have high tribute for mothers who did just that thing for them when they were boys. In their eagerness mothers may overlook the basis for meriting honors before Christ, but thank God for mothers who have ambition for their boys to be within reach of Christ when His blessings are distributed.

A FALSE PLAN OF PROMOTION

Mother and sons were misinformed about the true plans for promotion in the new realm. They had no guide but the practices of their day. They had seen royal honors bestowed on favorites. They had resented, no doubt, the unfair distribution, but were helpless to prevent it. Now was their chance and they obeyed the urging impulse and

followed the method of the world, because they knew not God's plan for promotion.

It is no wonder that today in every walk of life men are trying to rise by unscrupulous means to coveted positions. Some succeed by this method, so far as positions can be measured by honors and money. Even the Church is not free from this questionable plan of promotions. Luck and pull still play a part in individual exaltation. The mass of us see the falsity of this, but are helpless to alter it. Many a deserving servant of God stays in the lower place because he will not resort to a false plan of promotion.

THE WAY UP IS DOWN

This is the reverse order in God's kingdom as compared with human plans. Jesus declared and exemplified that he that humbles himself shall be exalted. Jesus was a servant and became the Saviour; He was lowly and became Lord of all; He was humble and became highest of all. It cost Him untold sufferings and humiliation to be ready for His ascension and exaltation.

This may not be an attractive course for promotion but it ends satisfactorily. The writer of great books is placed on a pinnacle, but men forget how long he struggled. His way up was down through the unmarked ways of trial. The national leader went down through hard work to climb up to harder work for a nation's welfare. The artist goes down through the discouraging years of patient waiting before climbing up to public praise. It is thus Jesus taught and lived.

"Humble we must be if to heaven we go;
High is the roof there; but the gate is low."

JESUS' SELF-MEASUREMENT

What did Jesus think of Himself? How did He judge His life among men? What was His standard of character and conduct for himself? It is found in two words, used by Him about himself, "minister" and "ransom." He told what He was there to do—to minister. He told what He was to be—a ransom. Neither was desirable from any human reckoning, but Jesus made these the measure of His life. His promotion to the right hand of God was based on these.

Followers of Him need to imitate Him in willingness to minister and to use life unselfishly for others, even for those out of their class. The reality of following Jesus means more than joining a shouting crowd. It calls for drinking His cup of service and suffering and sacrifice, when occasions demand. There is too little thought given today to the cost of deserved promotion in the kingdom of God. We are more concerned about goals than about the going toward them.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

Read Matthew 20:29—21:46. Note the places mentioned, the journeys taken, the people encountered, the things Jesus did and the words He spoke. Why did the crowd follow Jesus and acclaim Him King? How was Jesus affected by this?

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 20:29—21:46. (Print 21:1-11.)

(American Standard Revision Text)

21:1. And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and came unto Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples,

2. saying unto them, Go into the village that is over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose *them*, and bring *them* unto me.

3. And if any one say aught unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them.

4. Now this is come to pass, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophet, saying,

5. Tell ye the daughter of Zion,
Behold, thy King cometh unto thee,
Meek, and riding upon an ass,

And upon a colt the foal of an ass.
6. And the disciples went, and did even as Jesus appointed them,

7. and brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their garments; and he sat thereon.

8. And the most part of the multitude spread their garments in the way; and others cut branches from the trees, and spread them in the way.

9. And the multitudes that went before him, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.

10. And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, Who is this?

11. And the multitudes said, This is the prophet, Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.—Matthew 21:9.

LESSON GOAL.—To discover the kingly qualities of Jesus and show how to make Him our King.

LESSON PLAN

I. THE KING'S POWER MANIFESTED.

1. Opening Blind Eyes (20:29-34).
2. Entering Jerusalem (21:1-11).
3. Cleansing the Temple (12-17).
4. Withering a Fruitless Tree (18-22).

II. THE KING'S AUTHORITY QUESTIONED (23-27).

III. THE KING'S JUDGMENTS DECLARED.

1. Two Different Sons (28-32).
2. The Wicked Husbandmen (33-46).

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

Verse 7: *Brought the ass and the colt.*—Oriental nations assigned a very high value to the ass, which is said to have been of a more stately and handsome appearance than the ignoble animal of the same kind found in countries farther north. Like the mule, it was preferred to a horse for riding by men of the highest rank. The colt whereon no man ever sat was chosen as the conception of purity or fitness for sacred uses and was specially connected in the minds of ancient Jews and Gentiles

with an animal that had not yet performed any labor.—*The Lutheran Commentary.*

Verse 8: *Spread their garments in the way . . . cut branches from the trees.*—To the Oriental rulers are honored. Nothing is spared by the people to show them respect. The costliest rugs are thrown in their pathway, the finest flowers are strewn beneath their feet. It was conforming to this custom that led to using garments and tree branches for Jesus' to pass over. Israel thus honored Jehu; they "took every man his garment and put it under him on the bare steps of the stairs." In later times, "the people of Bethlehem threw their garments under the feet of the horses of the English consul." It is told that "the people threw themselves in the way when a great Moslem sheik entered a town."

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

The journey from Jericho to Jerusalem was a hard one. The climb from the level of the Jordan to the heights of the holy city was about 3,700 feet in a distance of about fifteen miles. The winding road among the rugged hills covers twice that distance. Many magnificent views flash on the eye as one reaches different vantage points, but for the most part one feels "as if he were enclosed in frowning cliffs or between the dark walls of a prison. The road is usually hot, close, with an occasional breeze after the middle of the day." Today there is a good automobile road the entire distance, but Jesus made the journey on foot.

Bethany is on the southeastern slope of Mount Olivet. Today it has nothing to commend it, other than its historical significance. There are some grain fields near it. Fig and olive trees are to be seen. "There are three roads from Bethany to Jerusalem. The most frequently traveled route by the natives is the one that bends around to the southward and reaches the Kedron valley after passing the Latin Gethsemane." It was this road that Jesus followed. From this road Jerusalem is in plain view. In Jesus' day the temple was the outstanding object as He passed along the road in the valley that separates Mount Olivet from Jerusalem. The site of Bethphage is undetermined; it was probably at the foot of the mount not far from the road. From Bethany to Jerusalem is scarcely two miles.

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

THE KING'S POWER MANIFESTED

There are four of these manifestations as recorded by Matthew. The first was *opening blind eyes* (20:29-34). While there is not exact agreement in the accounts given of this miracle by Mark and Luke with the record by Matthew, there need be no difficulty in adjusting the matter, when it is remembered that each wrote from his own viewpoint and according to the information at hand. It is clear that Jericho was the scene of the restoring sight to blind beggars, Bartimæus probably being one of them. There was a multitude following Jesus. He was on His way from Jericho up to Jerusalem. The beggars addressed Him as Lord, Son of David and requested His mercy on them. The crowd tried to check their outcry. They became more vehement. Jesus asked what they wanted Him to do. They asked to have their blind eyes opened. Jesus pitied them, touched their eyes and they saw and joined the following crowd.

This miracle is set over against the spiritual blindness manifested

by the disciples immediately before. This is the last miracle of healing recorded, "unless we include the healing of the wounded man in the Garden of Gethsemane."

"The time for miracles was past. He had reached the end of His last journey, and was about to consummate His life in Jerusalem. He had little to add to what He had already told His disciples; the greater part of the closing chapters of the Gospel consists of public preaching and action which explain and illustrate the events which immediately led to His death."—*T. H. Robinson.*

The second manifestation of power was His *entering Jerusalem* (21:1-11). This has become a familiar story to us. We hear it at least twice a year, on Advent Sunday and on Palm Sunday. Jesus had changed His attitude toward publicity. Prior to this He shunned it, but on this occasion He wanted it. He had refused an offered crown, but here He assumes the kingly display. The colt had not been ridden. A king did not ride the beast of another. It was unworked animals that were used for sacred purposes (Num. 19:2). Jesus saw to it that such an animal was procured. Matthew links this part of the story with the prophecies of Isaiah and Zechariah. The disciples saddled the colt with their outer garments in token of reverence for their Lord. This was in true Oriental custom. The crowd took up the suggestion and gave vent to their kingly desires by strewing the way with branches of trees. Palm branches were used. The proclamation of the crowd was gathered from the Psalms, in which they accorded to Him messianic titles, "the Son of David" and "He who comes." Their words were thanksgiving, praise and petition. Hosanna means, "Save now we pray." Jesus allowed this demonstration; it was a recognition of His power, a public pledge of faith in Him. He was a King, but in contrast with the royal splendor of a conqueror, marching on the city he had overpowered. Jesus had failed to win Jerusalem, yet he was approaching it as a meek and lowly King by right of His humble service. His words were not boastful but pathetic; His face did not glow with triumph but was wet with tears of grief over the stubborn city that had missed its opportunity.

The coming of the crowd and their shouts stirred the city to excitement. The claim that Jesus was King aroused the people. The report of the birth of a king had not been forgotten. Some were filled with fear, some were merely curious. Their question was natural, "Who is this?" The answer indicated the popular idea about Jesus that He was a prophet coming from Nazareth of Galilee. However the crowd did not acclaim Him as Messiah.

Cleansing the temple (12-17) was another show of His power. Jesus went to the temple and discovered that the court of the Gentiles had become a place for exchanging money and selling birds and animals for sacrifices. This was depriving the Gentiles of their rightful place. It was degrading the place of worship. The extortionate rate of exchange charged and the inflated price for doves and animals made the

merchants there little less than thieves. People from distant places must exchange foreign money for Jewish. They could not bring with them the living things for sacrifice. Privilege had been granted by the high priests to whom there came much profit in return. This method of privileged bargaining was unpopular, so the people were with Jesus in His ridding the court of these dealers. Jesus sarcastically rebuked the leaders by quoting the words of Isaiah and Jeremiah to them. Later "the market was swept away in an outburst of popular indignation three years before the fall of the city."

Jesus showed His authority in cleansing the temple and immediately in healing the blind and lame. There was an outburst of praise from the children. The priests were troubled and angered. They tried to shame Him but He quoted from the Scripture and left the city and retired to Bethany for the night. The priests and scribes planned how they might stop Jesus' popularity.

A fourth manifestation of His power was made in *withering a fruitless tree* (18-22). Both the method and motive of Jesus in "cursing" the figless tree provoke argument. Evidently His aim was to teach His disciples a truth. This has been termed an "acted parable." He emphasized the prevailing power of faith, as well as the failing religiousness of the Jews. "The fig tree with leaves and no fruit was the Jewish people, and especially those of Jerusalem; professing spiritual wealth by temple ceremonial, regard for the minutia of the law and the ordered round of fast and festival, they yet were barren of true religion. The withering of the tree was the divine sentence of spiritual blight and dryness that would fall upon Israel" (*Micklem*). The wondering disciples were told that true faith had mighty power. He used a commonly employed proverb, referred to the rabbis who were called "uprooters of mountains" when they solved hard problems. His words are not to be taken literally. Genuine faith always is submissive to God's will and wisdom; the believing prayer does not command God; it asks and waits.

THE KING'S AUTHORITY QUESTIONED

23-27. The leaders challenged Jesus to prove His right to take charge of the temple and teach doctrines condemnatory of their practices. He cleverly made them face self-condemnation as to their treatment of John the Baptist. He made His answer to them conditional on their answering His question. They were caught in their own trap. They could not answer Him; He did not answer them.

THE KING'S JUDGMENTS DECLARED

In the two parables which followed Jesus showed up the fallacy of the Jews' attitude by telling of *two different sons* (28-32), one of whom, like the Jews, promised much but did nothing and the other, like the publicans and harlots, promised nothing but did all that was expected of them. The meaning of this parable was clear to the Jews. He exposed them further by telling of the wicked husbandmen ((33-46) who illus-

trated the Jews' treatment of God, by plotting to keep everything for themselves and openly rejecting God's messengers, even going to the length of slaying His Son.

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

A CHANGED MEANING

Jerusalem, city of famous men and buildings and history! Jerusalem, slow to believe, contented in smug satisfaction, doomed to fall! Jesus had seen it as a boy, in its former meaning; He saw it now in its latter meaning. His emotions were changed as He viewed Jerusalem now. The walls were the same, the buildings had the same glow in the sunshine, but the people were not the same, as Jesus thought of them, and it was the people who determined the fate of the city.

It is ever thus. Even with us meanings change as we get to know the characters of men and nations. What a glamour of glory hangs over Tangier as one approaches it over the water in the early morning; Its beauty is dazzling and one is impelled to hasten into that ancient city. But, having been there and walked among its people and seen their squalor and the filth of the narrow streets, one comes away depressed. Tangier has a changed meaning, when its people are seen.

WHAT THE LORD NEEDS

One of the hard things for us to realize is that Jesus ever is in need. We regard Him as Lord of all, the owner of all. And yet He has needs that we must supply. He depended on His disciples to get the colt, on the crowd to provide the demonstration for His royal entry into Jerusalem. He is still our dependent Lord, not that this suggests any inability on His part, but that it grants us the privilege of working together with Him. We are too apt to want to march in the procession with Him without providing anything for Him. We are happy to hear that His kingdom is coming in the earth but we are not eager to pay the cost for its coming. We want the world to honor our Lord but we are not always zealous to prepare the world to do Him deserved honor.

DIRECTIONS FOR SERVING JESUS

These came from Jesus. He told His disciples what to do, where to go, and how they should answer questions. He helped them to help Him; He asked nothing of them that He did not assist them in doing.

Have conditions changed? We hear much about serving God these days. Glibly we talk about this worried old world and become eloquent in depicting its untoward conditions and the only way for its betterment. Talk like this is easy to say and fine to hear. But too many of us are doing too little in this service. We do not seem to know how to go about it. But we can know. Jesus is giving us directions now, just as He did to His disciples. The principles on which all service rests are in the Bible; the Church offers us instruction; our own minds can tell us how to serve Jesus. Our relation to Jesus is our motive for

service and where the motive is strong the way of service will not be hard to find.

SPASMODIC DEMONSTRATION

We are victims of the popular. We join the crowd. We shout hosannas with others, then we cry "crucify" with them. We praise the hero today and denounce him tomorrow. We make extravagant promises, and straightway forget them. We burst forth in adoration and with the passing of its sound goes our emotion for praise. We are so spasmodic in our demonstrations.

There must be a certain sameness and stability in us if our religious demonstrations are to be fruitful. The venture into the unaccustomed, like the attempt of the flying fish, ends quickly. We cannot do successfully what we are not thoroughly fitted to do. To be good sometimes does not save the criminal. To be religious now and then does not maintain right relations to God. To have occasional moments of blessing to talk about and sing about cannot build a life in God.

THE CENTER OF THE CROWD

The casual observer rarely knows what collects the crowd. It may be a national celebration; he probably will understand why there are crowds for that. But why the local crowds? What has brought the people together? Is it a movement for community uplift? Is it a strike or a fight? One never can know without being told.

The first Palm Sunday crowd centered around Jesus. But for the most part He meant but little to that crowd. However, He is the most worth-while center for any crowd to have. He is the center of great crowds today, crowds that know Him, believe in Him, worship and serve Him, and seek to follow Him until He is acclaimed King of kings and Lord of lords. The Christian Church is such a crowd, the most influential crowd in the world today, as far as world betterment is concerned.

JESUS IN THE CITY

Jerusalem rejected Jesus, but His presence there caused great commotion. They asked who He was? They wondered about the stir He made. Had He been given a chance, had His principles been practiced, Jerusalem's place in the world today would certainly be different and its history for the past nineteen centuries would be different.

One is struck with the contrast between cities where Christ is recognized and where He is not. There is evidence of a higher level of living in Christian than in non-Christian cities. More is done for general welfare where Christ is known. The Christian Church makes for a better city and Christian people are its leaven of righteousness and humanitarianism and uplifting religion.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

Read Matthew 22: 1—23: 39. How does the parable of the marriage feast apply to our day? Why was the tribute to Cæsar much disputed? What was the attitude of the Herodians? Did Jesus answer the question about the commandments wisely? Why did Jesus denounce the Pharisees?

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 22: 1—23: 39. (Print 22: 15-22, 34-40.)

(American Standard Revision Text)

22: 15. Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might ensnare him in *his* talk.

16. And they send to him their disciples, with the Herodians, saying, Teacher, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, and carest not for any one: for thou regardest not the person of men.

17. Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Cæsar, or not?

18. But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why make ye trial of me, ye hypocrites?

19. Show me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a denarius.

20. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription?

21. They say unto him, Cæsar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Cæsar the things that

are Cæsar's; and unto God the things that are God's.

22. And when they heard it, they marvelled, and left him, and went away.

34. But the Pharisees, when they heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, gathered themselves together.

35. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, trying him:

36. Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?

37. And he said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

38. This is the great and first commandment.

39. And a second like *unto it* is this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

40. On these two commandments the whole law hangeth, and the prophets.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second like unto it is this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.—Matthew 22: 37-39.

LESSON GOAL.—To show what Jesus requires in good citizens.

LESSON PLAN

I. A ROYAL INVITATION IGNORED. (22: 1-14.)

II. THREE FAULTFINDING QUESTIONS. (15-40.)

1. About Tribute to Cæsar.
2. About Life After Death.
3. About the Commandments.

III. A QUESTION OF JESUS UNANSWERED. (41-46.)

IV. SOME BITTER WORDS OF JESUS. (23: 1-39.)

1. Against Pharisaism.
2. The Seven Woes.
3. The Outcry of Grief.

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

Verse 17: *To give tribute unto Cæsar.*—Following the exile the Jews were used to paying taxes to foreign governments; often these taxes were heavy. In addition they were compelled to contribute to maintain their own religious, educational and civic projects. The tax to Rome was bitterly resented by the Pharisees, although the Herodians favored it. The tax was "a Roman poll-tax, and, perhaps, a land-tax, also."

Verse 19: *Tribute money*.—This was of Roman coinage. The Pharisees would not carry it, so a coin was “brought” to Jesus. “It was a Roman coin worth about fifteen cents. It was of foreign stamp, since those struck in Judæa usually had the device of the Maccabean period. The tax was payable in Roman, not Judæan, coin. By accepting this as current coin they virtually acknowledged themselves as subjects of Cæsar.”

Verse 20: *Image and superscription*.—The coin, *denarius*, handed to Jesus had on the obverse side the head of Tiberius, laureated, with the words, *Ti. Cæsar Divi Aug. F. Augustus* (Tiberius Cæsar the son of the deified Augustus himself Augustus). On the reverse side was a seated figure, Livia, holding scepter and flower, with the words *Pontif. Maxim.* (*Pontifex Maximus*).

Verse 35: *A lawyer*.—“The lawyer, among the Jews, was not one versed in the civil code, as with us. He was versed in the Jewish divine law; hence he resembled our theologian, or professor in theology.”—*Dr. Rice*.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

Following the three parables, the rulers felt keenly denounced by Jesus. He had exposed their hypocritical attitudes and practices. It was customary to question Jewish rabbis, even if the questions interfered with their words. It seemed proper to ask Jesus questions, and their cleverness of plot did not seem apparent to the casual listeners. So in turn different questions were put to Him in the hope of ensnaring Him in His answers. All the questions were based on matters of current dispute, the tribute to Rome, the resurrection, and the relative rank of commandments.

This discussion took place on Tuesday in the temple. “The record of this day is so crowded,” says Edersheim, “the actors introduced on the scene are so many, the occurrences so varied, and the transitions so rapid, that it is even more than usually difficult to arrange all in chronological order. Nor need we wonder at this, when we remember that this was, so to speak, Christ’s last working day—the last of His public mission to Israel, so far as its active part is concerned; the last day in the temple; the last, of teaching and warning to Pharisees and Sadducees; the last, of His call to national repentance.”

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

What is recorded in the two chapters of our lesson (Matt. 22, 23) took place on Tuesday in the temple court. This was the third temple on Mt. Moriah. The first built by Solomon was destroyed. The second, built under Zerubbabel, was allowed to fall into decay. The third was built by Herod the Great. It was begun about twenty years before Christ. It was built of white marble, “much of the sacred portions being plated with silver and gold.” The entire enclosure, including courts and porches, was spoken of as “temple.” There were four of these courts: the court of the Gentiles, farthest from the temple proper; the court of the women, the court of Israel, fifteen steps higher; the court of the priests, nearest to the temple. Jesus was teaching in the temple court, probably the court of Israel. Much of this teaching grew out of disputations started by His foes.

A ROYAL INVITATION IGNORED

Matthew alone (22:1-14) records this parable. Jesus spoke it to show the fate of the indifferent Jews and to tell that there would be an intensive sifting so that none would be in the kingdom who was not worthy. The Oriental tale of the marriage feast was exact in details. Custom was followed carefully in His description. The announcement was made, which was a general invitation to chosen guests. Later word was sent that the day and hour had arrived. The direct application was to the announcement made to the Jews for the coming of Jesus; then the actual advent of Jesus. But the Jews had refused Him; they would not come to honor Him. But God had enlarged the scope of His invitation; He asked those to come whom the Jews despised, and they were coming to be Jesus' followers. Lest there might be accusation of indiscriminate acceptance of the guests, Jesus added the part about the man who was rejected because he was unfit to remain at the wedding feast. The whole parable points to the strictness with which being in the kingdom was safeguarded. The Jews debarred themselves; the man was unfit to remain. The highest care was taken to prevent any but the fit to be in the kingdom. But the refusal of the Jews would not leave the wedding without guests.

THREE FAULT-FINDING QUESTIONS

Jesus was fearlessly decrying the attitudes of the Jews. This was particularly offensive to the Pharisees. They had tried to belittle His authority as a religious teacher, but He kept on teaching. They had no grounds for arresting Him as a criminal. They went into a secret session to devise a plot. Their conclusion was to lay a trap for Him and induce Him to say something that might be used as a charge against Him. They did not come out in the open, but sent their young disciples to join with the Herodians to ask a question about the lawfulness of paying tribute to Rome. The Pharisees opposed all foreign rule over Judæa. The Herodians were favorable to Roman rule and antagonized the Pharisees. But both parties were agreed in trying to dispose of Jesus.

So the question *about tribute to Cæsar* was asked, as though they were eager to get His view on the troublesome matter. They approached Him with flattering praise. "His position was indeed embarrassing. Had He declined to answer, they would have accused Him of cowardly evasion; and it was equally perilous to answer yes or no. If He approved, He would offend the popular sentiment, while if He disapproved, He would be liable to a charge of treason" (*David Smith*). Jesus did not dally with their hypocrisy. He tore off their mask and denounced their pretense. Jesus in turn set a trap for them. He asked for a coin. One was handed to Him. He asked the significance of its markings and learned from them that it bore the image and superscription of Cæsar. That was enough; they were caught. By having and using the coinage of Rome, they acknowledged Roman protection in their business transactions. So they were obliged to render, pay what

was due, to the government that protected them. (The question had said "give" as though it was a matter of enforced charity). This answer would please the Herodians. But Jesus added that obligation to God was supreme. It, too, must be met. They were recipients of everything from God and must pay what was due to Him. This would please the Pharisees. But Jesus had driven home the larger truth that there is a double obligation for every citizen: taxes must be paid; the Church must be supported.

The Sadducees were listening. They were proud, aristocratic rationalists, who accepted only the books of Moses. They rejected resurrection as a false, modern teaching. They took delight in outwitting the Pharisees. Seeing the Pharisees and Herodians baffled, they intended showing their superior ability to confound Jesus. Hence their question *about life after death*. Their proposition seemed a sure way to disprove physical resurrection, and if Jesus agreed with them, He would be open to attack by the Pharisees. They quoted Moses. They set up a hypothetical case, in which seven brothers in turn had the same wife. They asked whose wife she would be in the life after death. Jesus boldly accused them of ignorance of the Scriptures and of God's power. He gave a new insight into the resurrection state, in which the relations of earthly conditions would be supplanted by spiritual conditions. Then He added His testimony, favoring immortality, by referring to God's saying that He is the God of the patriarchs, whom He must regard as living, for it is unthinkable for the dead to know God. The Sadducees had no better success than the Pharisees and Herodians in trapping Jesus.

The Pharisees dared to make another attempt. They put forward one of their scribes. He asked the question *about the commandments*. There was a dispute about the ranking of the commandments. Jesus swept the dispute aside and put love to God as the first commandment and love to neighbor as the second, but like the first in its demand for obedience. Jesus added that "on these two, as on a strong hook, hangeth all the teachings in the law and in the prophets. These are fundamental; all others are expansions of these principles."

A QUESTION OF JESUS UNANSWERED (41-46)

Victorious in answering questions, Jesus turns questioner. He traps the Pharisees. They are willing to say the Messiah is David's son. Jesus demanded their explanation of the words they attributed to David in the psalm He quoted. This they could not do. His questions had baffled them. After that they made no "further attempts to ask Him caviling, crafty questions."

SOME BITTER WORDS OF JESUS

Chapter twenty-three opens with a warning to the people *against the Pharisees*, who command one thing but live another. There follow the *seven woes*, "the most terrible philippic that ever fell on human ears, all the more terrible that it was uttered by lips which were of wont so

gracious." The conclusion is *the outcry of grief*, the last appeal of Jesus to Jerusalem. He was to teach no more in the temple-court. He had come to the end of His public ministry, and Jerusalem had refused Him and her fate was sealed. But a note of hope was sounded; blessing would come to any who would welcome Him.

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

FLATTERY

Truth falsely spoken may be only flattery used with a wicked motive. This was what happened to Jesus. The Pharisees and Herodians tried to lead Jesus into a trap by using what was true but using it falsely. He was true, a teacher of the way of God, and did not need to bow to the opinions of any man. But as spoken by His enemies these words were like poison to Him. He saw through the veneer of their smooth speech; their honeyed lips covered poison.

Still men try to deceive God by flattery. Prayers are often a false use of what is true. To ascribe fine praises to God when the heart does not feel their potency is like trying to flatter God to persuade Him to do what He ought not do. Flattery addressed to God is just as frequent as addressed to men. In neither case does it accomplish its purpose.

DECEPTIVE INNOCENCE

The trick question asked Jesus about paying tribute to Rome apparently was an innocent one sincerely asked. But in it was a challenge, which Jesus readily seized. The appeal to His judgment as though eager to know and follow His instruction appeared to be honorable. The much disputed matter was put up to Him. He was given the chance to assert himself. This might have taken Him off guard. But He penetrated the sham and saw the hypocrisy back of the apparent innocence. There was room for sincerity in the questioners for they asked a moot question, but so often had they proved themselves schemers that Jesus could not help suspicioning their motive in asking about the tribute. "The truth itself is not believed in one who often has deceived."

WICKEDNESS PENETRATED

A cashier had been trusted for years. He had walked among men as upright and no thought ever entered the public mind that he could be crooked. The regular visits of the inspectors were made. They found every phase of his records so exact that he was mentioned as an ideal banker. Then the crash came. He reached the place where his studied, prolonged scheme of defrauding was detected. He could not cover his errors or delude the inspectors. His wickedness was penetrated.

The deceiving banker was discovered by fellow mortals. Even from the eye of men wickedness cannot be concealed. What then of the folly of attempting to cover up wickedness so that God cannot see it? God is not deceived; He never can be. No pretense of righteousness blinds His eye to the presence of wrong.

INSINCERITY EXPOSED

"Whose is this image and superscription?" They knew and Jesus knew that having the coin with Roman markings indicated their acceptance of Roman rule and protection in business dealings. Their resentment of Roman tax was not on principle so much as on love of money. Besides the Herodians outwardly agreed to the justice of the taxation. Probably both Pharisees and Herodians were insincere about it. But insincerity cannot escape the scrutiny of Jesus. He exposes it. He brings it forth for ridicule and denunciation. He turns the assumed zest into a blush.

In Timon of Athens Shakespeare presents Timon as popular and having many friends, apparently devoted to him, because he showers them with presents. He loses his wealth and his friends desert him, not willing to share his poverty or assist him. He realizes their insincerity and ultimately having regained riches wreaks vengeance on them.

A COMPLETE CODE

Render to God and to man, to the Church and to the State, is the code for true religious living. Man owes his government what is asked in taxes in return for what he receives from his government. He also owes his God what is expected of him in return for what God does for him. A state of life without government and without God may be imagined; in such a state there would be nothing to pay, no demands to be met. But who would want such a life? Such a state could not long exist, for where two or three are together government starts, one to rule and the others to be ruled. Wherever a man may be, as lonely as possible, he has an inner, inescapable consciousness of God and a realization of owing God something. Jesus announced the complete code for controlling a man who would be ranked as a good citizen; it consists in giving the State what is due to it and in giving God what is due to Him.

LOVE UPHOLDS ALL

The rules for living are not always understood. Some of them are resented as infringing on personal rights. Laws are despised unless there is a conviction that they are for our benefit. Commandments, even God's, are not welcomed unless there is an appreciation of God. The motive back of the command must be known or the command will be unwelcome and be obeyed under protest. But where love is commands are not despised. If the giver of the law is loved then his laws will be upheld. Love not only conquers; love upholds. It not only fights to protect; it lives to preserve. God has no trouble with the people who love Him. Government runs smoothly when its subjects are patriots in peace as well as in war. Love is the fulfilling of the law; love is the upholder of all that is worth while.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

Read Matthew 24:1—25:13. Why did the disciples discuss the temple with Jesus? What discussion took place on the Mount of Olives? What led to the parable of the ten virgins? Is the parable true to Oriental custom? Does it have a direct teaching for our day?

JESUS DESCRIBES THE FUTURE OF THE KINGDOM

Lesson VIII
May 25

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 24:1—25:13. (Print 25:1-13.)

(American Standard Revision Text)

25:1. Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.

2. And five of them were foolish, and five were wise.

3. For the foolish, when they took their lamps, took no oil with them:

4. but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.

5. Now while the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.

6. But at midnight there is a cry, Behold, the bridegroom! Come ye forth to meet him.

7. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.

8. And the foolish said unto the wise,

Give us of your oil; for our lamps are going out.

9. But the wise answered, saying, Peradventure there will not be enough for us and you: go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.

10. And while they went away to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage feast: and the door was shut.

11. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us.

12. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.

13. Watch therefore, for ye know not the day nor the hour.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is.—Mark 13:33.

LESSON GOAL.—To teach Christian preparedness for receiving Jesus.

LESSON PLAN

I. A SERIES OF PREDICTIONS.

1. Questioned by the Disciples (24:1-3).
2. Destruction of Jerusalem (4-28).
3. Consummation of the Age (29-51).

II. PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS. (25:1-13.)

1. How They Prepared.
2. Ready and Welcomed.
3. Late and Left Out.

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

Verse 1: *Took their lamps*.—"The lamps consisted of a round receptacle for pitch or oil for the wick. This was placed in a hollow cup or deep saucer, which was fastened by a pointed end into a long wooden pole, on which it was borne aloft" (*Edersheim*). Extra vessels of oil had to be carried to keep the lamp supplied.

Verse 6: *Behold the bridegroom!*—After a weary wait, the delayed approach of the bridegroom was announced. "It is inconsistent with Oriental custom for the groom personally to conduct the bride to his home. He leaves his home with company long enough for the bride

to be brought, and returns to find her in the woman's room of his house. The pair are regarded as 'man and wife' after betrothal, though the marriage feast may not take place for a year. The bridesmaids, always virgins, go forth to meet the bridegroom and accompany him to the feast." (*Dr. Rice*).

Verse 10: *The door was shut*.—This was "as much for the security and joy without interruption of those within, as for the lasting exclusion of those without." Robbers were ever alert to break into places of marriage festivities to pilfer jewelry, garments, and, if possible, the bride herself.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

Following the discourse to the multitude in the temple court in which Jesus pronounced the seven woes against the hypocritical Pharisees, closing with His pathetic and prophetic lamentation over Jerusalem, He left the temple and the city and journeyed toward Bethany. On the way He stopped on the Mount of Olives and sat down to talk with His disciples. It was in the late afternoon of Tuesday.

The Lord left the temple for the last time on Tuesday afternoon. His public labors were ended. There remained, however, a few hours before the passover. How was this period spent? We can well believe that some part of it was spent alone that He might enjoy that free communion with God which He had so earnestly sought in the midst of His active labors, and which was now doubly dear to Him in view of His speedy death. Some part of it also was doubtless devoted to His disciples, giving them such counsel and encouragement as was demanded by the very peculiar and trying circumstances in which they were placed. That Wednesday was spent in retirement is generally admitted.—*Andrews*.

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

Jesus with His disciples had left the temple and gone out of the city on their way to Bethany. It had been a taxing day for the Master and a trying one for the disciples. They were puzzled at His daring statements. He had defied Jewish authority and had denounced iniquities. He had shown His spirit of pity, even while pronouncing bitter woes. More was to be said that day to enrich succeeding generations. The glimpse into the future events, those concerning the end of Jerusalem and the end of the world, was to be given. He was not understood by His disciples; His words have not been given unanimous interpretation since that time. Many have missed His truth by speculating on what referred to Jerusalem and what did not.

A SERIES OF PREDICTIONS

Jesus was *questioned by His disciples* (24:1-3) as they left Jerusalem and when they rested on Mt. Olivet. They called His attention to the magnificent temple. Its huge stones seemed fixed in place for ages. Josephus states some of the stones were seventy-five feet long, eight feet thick and ten feet wide. There was a question in their minds. They wondered how Jesus' predicted overthrow of the temple could be possible. His reply was an assured destruction of the temple; its massive

stones would be overthrown. Out on the side of the mount of Olives the grandeur of the temple and city was plainly seen. Mark says that four disciples, Peter, James, John and Andrew, asked Him for the time and the signs of the coming destruction and of His return. These questions opened the way for the following discourses.

Jesus discussed with them the *destruction of Jerusalem* (4-28) as a certain fact to come. Into this discussion He wove references that apparently point to other matters than the fate of the city, such as the false prophets, the attitude of the people, the proclamation of the Gospel and the signs of His coming. Volumes have been written about these words of Jesus.

Many perplexing questions have been asked about Jesus' statements about the *consummation of the age* (29-51) and the relation of His coming to that fact. The attempt to determine the date of it goes back to the days of the apostles, who anticipated a speedy return of the Lord. Scores of times in the past individuals and groups have worried, at times into fanatical fury, over the date of His return. Often they have missed the great truth that He will return, no matter when, and that our chief concern is to be ready for Him when He comes.

PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS

To establish the vital truth that though the hour of His coming is not certain it behooves His followers to be prepared to meet Him, He gave the parable of the ten virgins. "The parable centers upon the delay of the bridegroom's return and the need of practical wisdom in making provision against the unknown time of his coming. The figure of the lamps and the oil suggests the particular kind of spiritual provision which is inculcated. It is the cultivation of the inner life of communion and devotion, and the need in quiet times of storing up a reserve of grace to help in times of need that is pressed home" (*Mickle*). This same truth is stressed by what follows in the chapter (14-46).

How they prepared is a picture of Oriental wedding customs. The uncertainty of travel made the hour of the arrival of the bridegroom so indefinite that preparation to meet him at night as well as by day was necessary. Lamps were provided but no lamp would hold oil enough to keep it burning long and to meet the emergency of the bridegroom's delayed arrival extra vessels of oil were carried. Of the ten virgins five had been careful about such preparation. The others had depended on his speedy arrival and expected their lamps would burn brightly until that time. Jesus made it very clear that the hour could not be set and that each of the virgins should have understood this fact well enough to have used good judgment and planned to keep their lamps burning, no matter how long they had to wait.

The only thing these virgins knew certainly was that the bridegroom was on the way and would reach them at some time. They were at liberty to meet the natural demands for sleep. They would have ample

warning of his approach and could be up and ready to go with him into the wedding feast. It seems that none of them worried about the exact hour of his coming. Five of them took for granted that he would arrive early and made little preparation. Five of them got their lamps and oil ready to meet him whether he came soon or late.

In due time his coming was announced. Five of them were *ready and welcomed* by him. This was to be expected for they had prepared for his coming. But there was a sudden outcry on the part of those who expected him sooner. They put the final touches on their lamps. They fixed the wicks; their lamps had the outward appearance that was promising. But their lamps flickered and disgraced them. They were startled but too late. They thought of extra oil when there was no chance to get it. They tried to get in with the bridegroom on the oil borrowed from the wise and found this impossible. Even the wisest had none to spare. They were under no obligation to help out the negligent. The procession moved into the place of the wedding feast; it was headed by five, instead of ten light-bearing virgins. They were welcomed and went into the wedding feast, as they deserved to do, because they were prepared in advance for the bridegroom's coming.

The others were *late and left out*. Their anxiety was too late; they had trusted to themselves too long. There was no time for them to make amends for their folly. The bridegroom would not delay. They made a desperate effort to get a last-minute supply of oil, with what success does not matter. It was too late for them to use it, even if they were able to secure it. The doors were shut. The doorkeeper refused to let them go in. They must stay outside in the darkness. Even their lights, if they had succeeded in getting oil, would be a mockery to themselves. They learned to their sorrow that their chief concern should have been thorough preparedness, rather than any supposition that the bridegroom would come before their lamps went out.

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

THE DESIRE OF ALL

The universal quest for a sight of God, to have a God who can be seen as we see the things of nature, must be a fact. Our God is a Spirit and hence invisible, but in His wisdom He has given evidences of His presence. He set the rainbow in the heavens as token of a covenant; He gave assurance of leading Israel through the pillar of cloud; He hung the shekinah over the mercy seat; He sent His Son Jesus into the world . . . God would not tolerate idols but He supplanted idols by signs of His presence. Man's desire is to be worthy to be in the presence of God.

It was this desire that Jesus illustrated in the preparation of the virgins to meet the bridegroom. This bridegroom was a coming one, one of importance, one to be honored and to bestow honor, one who passed but once. If they desired to see him they must be ready when he came.

WISDOM AND FOLLY TESTED

We live together regardless of class, traits or worth. The drift of humanity carries us along without much attention being paid to whether we are wise or foolish. This is true from many viewpoints. But tests are sure to come which finally classify us. In a crowded car we travel over the same street towards some destination. We are thrown together, regardless of natural or acquired differences. We occupy the same seat with one whose life purposes are not ours; he may be morally better or worse, religiously superior or inferior, in relation to God wise or foolish. Our gauge of testing deals with external things but the true test of lasting worth, the test that determines ultimate position, goes into the motives and intentions of the person. These may be judged somewhat by what Jesus termed "fruits," but whether this one or that one is wise or foolish regarding preparation to abide with God is not for man to decide. This decision is the prerogative of God. Man's part is to obey God's instruction and avoid the folly of unaided self-determination.

THE CALL—THE CRISIS

The discovery of unfitness is always a shock. Man needs not be told that he is not qualified to follow God into the secret of His presence; he makes the sad discovery himself. It is possible to be so intent on thinking of the hour and the condition of God's call, that one forgets to be prepared to answer the call. Dreaming of a glorious future, while ignoring the exacting present, may be a self-delusive practice, but many are indulging in this. It is so easy to suppose our lamps will burn long enough to light the way into heaven that we forget about the oil for the lamps. It is man's fatality to picture victory with its transcendent honors, and overlook the fight that goes before victory. The call to meet emergency is a crisis only for the man who is unprepared. The foolish virgins discovered this. The bridegroom's approach was no crisis for the wise virgins; they were prepared for his coming whether it came soon or late.

BELATED ANXIETY AND STINGING ADVICE

The foolish discovered their inability. It was their own fault. They had been neglectful. Anxiety seized them. Something must be done at once, or they would fail and be disgraced. They asked to be helped when they should have needed no help. They were too late with their anxious moments; their worries should have been earlier. They were advised to go and buy oil. What stinging advice! It drove the prick of conscience deep. It hurt. It was part of their punishment.

A college student had ignored all warnings. He had clung to his rounds of pleasure to the neglect of study. He wanted to graduate;

loved ones expected him to get through creditably. The time was drawing near that would test his fitness to receive a diploma. Suddenly he discovered with a shock that his credits were deficient. He became overwhelmingly anxious; he sought advice, but the advice exposed his folly more and more. Nothing was in store for him but rejection, failure, shame. His belated anxiety could not lift the ban he had brought on himself.

WHERE HELP IS DENIED

The wise were willing to help the foolish but they could not. There would not be enough oil for all. The wise were not hard-hearted and unreasonable in refusing to share. There is a time when selfishness is necessary.

Besides this has a spiritual significance. There are spiritual possessions each must have for himself. He can have them, for the way to secure them is open before him and he has ample opportunity to get what he needs. The willingness of friends and loved ones to give him from their spiritual stores, to make up for him what he lacks, cannot avail. There must be a steady acquisition of spiritual fitness to enjoy the eternal glories of God and each must do the acquiring for himself. "Religion in the wife's name" is a facetious but fatal remark of many a man. To say, "We have Abraham to our father," was denounced by John the Baptist as a hope for divine favor. (Ezek. 18: 20, 30; Matt. 12:37; I Cor. 3:8, 13-15; Gal. 6:5; Rev. 2:23).

UNKNOWN BY CHRIST

Here is a contradiction. If Christ is all-knowing, how can he say, "I never knew you?" (Matt. 7: 23). The returned bridegroom refused to open the door for the late comers, sending forth to them the sad, condemning words, "I know you not." He made this statement emphatically.

Can it be possible that men may be self-deceived? May they be professing Christians, wearing the garments and carrying the lamps, but failing to be known by Christ? Maybe they are not really one of those of whom the Good Shepherd says, "I know mine own." Identification of the victims of fire or disaster of some kind is often established by bits of clothing or jewelry. Often this is the only available clue. On such put-on things Jesus will not rest His knowledge of us. It is heart contact with Him, His word abiding in us, that will determine that we are His and known by Him. It is a sad conclusion in the parable that the foolish were left outside because they were unknown to the bridegroom.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

Read Matt. 25:14-46. What is meant by talents? What application can be made to us? Describe the scene of the judgment? Who is Judge? On what is judgment based?

CONTRAST BETWEEN FAITHFULNESS AND SLOTHFULNESS

Lesson IX
June 1

THE SUNDAY AFTER ASCENSION

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 25:14-46. (Print verses 14-30.)

(American Standard Revision Text)

14. For *it is as when* a man, going into another country, called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods.

15. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one; to each according to his several ability; and he went on his journey.

16. Straightway he that received the five talents went and traded with them, and made other five talents.

17. In like manner he also that *received* the two gained other two.

18. But he that received the one went away and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money.

19. Now after a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and maketh a reckoning with them.

20. And he that received the five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: lo, I have gained other five talents.

21. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

22. And he also that *received* the two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: lo, I have gained other two talents.

23. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

24. And he also that had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou didst not sow, and gathering where thou didst not scatter;

25. and I was afraid, and went away and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, thou hast thine own.

26. But his lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I did not scatter;

27. thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the bankers, and at my coming I should have received back mine own with interest.

28. Take ye away therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him that hath the ten talents.

29. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not, even that which he hath shall be taken away.

30. And cast ye out the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.—Matthew 25:21.

LESSON GOAL.—To discover what talents we have and where they may be put to use, so that we may serve Christ and His Church in the most helpful manner.

LESSON PLAN

I. TALENTS DISTRIBUTED. (25:14, 15.)

II. TALENTS PUT TO USE. (25:16, 17.)

III. TALENT HIDDEN AWAY. (25:18.)

IV. FAITHFULNESS REWARDED. (25:19-23.)

V. UNFAITHFULNESS PUNISHED. (25:24-30.)

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

Verse 14: *A man, going into another country.*—An Oriental man of wealth upon leaving his home for a time had to decide as to the arrangement of his affairs in his absence, two courses being open to him. He might take advantage of the money-changing or banking system in operation throughout the empire, or he might make his confidential servants his agents, giving them his money to be used by them in trade.

Verse 14: *His own servants.*—In ancient times slaves, or servants, were allowed to work at a trade or engage in business, paying a fixed sum annually to their master. In some cases money was committed to them with which to trade or enlarge their business, with the understanding that they should bring to their master a share of their profits.

Verse 18: *Had his lord's money.*—Burying money in the earth for safe-keeping has been a common practice in the East where people are distrustful of one another, and banks are few.

Verse 27: *The bankers.*—The word *bankers* is derived from a Greek word which means the bank or bench on which money was placed.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

The parable of the talents belongs to one of the longest of our Lord's discourses. The time was Tuesday of Holy Week. Jesus had spent much of the day in the temple, teaching the multitudes. When the day was well spent He went out, and started on His way to Bethany. As He and His disciples were ascending the Mount of Olives they called His attention to the buildings of the temple which could be seen to advantage from the top of the Mount.

This suggestion led Him to speak freely and at length concerning future events as they would have to do with the children of the kingdom. Parts of the discourse are somewhat obscure to us even now, but in the main we know perfectly well what Jesus had in mind. He spoke of the tribulation that should come and indicated some of the signs of the last times.

The chapter from which our study is taken falls into three sections: The parable of the ten virgins, the parable of the talents, and the judgment scene. It is not difficult to see the connection between the three. In the first we see the need of watching for our Lord, in the second we see the need of working for our Lord, and in the third we see the need of being ready to meet our Lord through faithfully ministering to those who are His.

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

TALENTS DISTRIBUTED

Verses 14, 15. This parable is closely connected with that of the ten virgins immediately preceding. The unity of thought is clear. The man going into a far country may have been one of the Herods making his way to Rome to procure his kingdom, and then returning. But before leaving he would call to him his servants, or slaves, who in many cases were men of education and administrative ability, and distribute his possessions among them as he saw fit.

This man is chosen to represent Jesus who, in a vivid picture, more than suggests to His disciples that He would soon take a journey into a far country, to be gone an indefinite period of time. But before

doing so He would commit the affairs of the kingdom into the hands of those who through personal choice had become His servants.

In the parable of the pounds, Luke 19: 12-27, the distribution is equal, each man receiving the same number of pounds. Here the distribution is varied, no two receiving the same gifts. The distribution is not an arbitrary one, though it is an authoritative one. No stress, however, is to be laid on the five, two and one. They were allotted as they were because of the individual power and ability of the servants. An employer today follows the same policy, placing responsibility where he thinks it will be best administered. Not all of Christ's disciples are equally capable, and so He divides His goods among them as seems best to Him. But while they may not be equally competent, they can be equally diligent, and that is what this parable is intended to teach.

TALENTS PUT TO USE

Verses 16, 17. When the householder had satisfied himself that he had made a wise and safe distribution of his property he started on his journey. The first two servants lost no time investing the talents they had received as a trust from their master. They knew what should be done, and they did it without debate or delay. They did not take advantage of his absence to appropriate to their own uses what he had with much confidence placed within their care.

In a short time the Master was to leave His disciples and return to the Father. But before doing so He committed the work He had begun and all the interests of the Church on earth to their keeping. They must have been inspired to extraordinary devotion when they heard Him tell of two men who had doubled for their earthly master what he had entrusted to them.

TALENT HIDDEN AWAY

Verse 18. Not all men are faithful either in secular or spiritual affairs. It has been suggested that the man with one talent acted as he did because he was angry or jealous when he saw that he was receiving less than the other two. This does not, however, seem to be included in the excuses he made a little later when he was called to account for his stewardship. It is quite clear that the servants had not been told into what business they were to enter; they were to have full initiative as stewards in handling the estate. They were to be free in making their plans.

In a land where there were few banks, and where people were suspicious of one another, a common method of making money secure was to bury it in the earth. Of course there would be no interest accruing in this way, and interest is what the householder wanted. It cannot be said this servant was dishonest; he was indolent.

FAITHFULNESS REWARDED

Verses 19-23. Stewardship implies reckoning. Perhaps the householder solemnly enjoined faithfulness upon his servants before he took

his leave, saying that he would return and call them to account. And though he was absent a long time, he did come back; and the first thing he did was to summon them into his presence to give an account of their investment and what came of it.

The first two were glad to report. They had been diligent and very successful. They had made a hundred per cent on their investment. Their work spoke for itself. Faithfulness is a mark of greatness. They did not fear to come into the presence of their lord. He commended them for their diligence and fidelity. Moffatt translates the words, "Capital, you excellent and trusty servant." They were high words of praise the lord spoke. He proceeded to promote his servants. They had been faithful in comparatively small matters, and he would make no mistake in entrusting larger responsibilities to their care. Diligence enlarges one's capacity and cultivates the spirit of honesty and loyalty which will not break under larger tasks. All that Jesus had said applies with equal force to the Christian. We are made able to do larger work by industry in the humbler stations. The man with limited opportunities is commended as is his more highly endowed brother. And Jesus is looking for faithfulness, not achievement; diligence, not success.

UNFAITHFULNESS PUNISHED

Verses 24-30. The servant with the one talent did not come into the presence of his lord with swift step. He at once began to offer excuses, which leaves no room to doubt that he stood self-condemned. His apologies and explanations added to his embarrassment in the rendering of his account. There was nothing he dreaded more than the day of reckoning.

His attempt to lay the blame for the result on his lord was cowardly and despicable. Thinking of him as an unscrupulous and overbearing master he claimed he was afraid to invest the talent lest he lose it and thus subject himself to the severest condemnation. A talent hid in the earth would be safe, but it could never draw any interest. What he did was to succeed in keeping the talent from diminution, which he appeared to think was all that could be required.

His lord saw through his motive and vain excuses all the time. But he let him run on until he had said all he could think of. Then the lord said, "Thou wicked and slothful servant." He did not pause to deny the charge of being hard and merciless, perhaps for the reason he knew that was not the real reason for the servant's maladministration of the talent. But even though the servant had been afraid of his master the thing for him to have done was to place the money in circulation and let it draw interest. The real reason for his failure was his wickedness and slothfulness. He had the wrong spirit. He cried out against circumstances. He was angry with his lord.

What about the talent? He could no longer keep it. He proved himself unprofitable and slothful. The talent could be made to yield a return, but not in his hands. It must be taken from him and given to the servant who appreciates a trust.

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

THE ASCENSION

The active ministry of Jesus covered some three years. In that time among other things He gathered a few men and women around Him. He tried to get them to see what He saw, and to feel what He felt, and to think of life as He thought of it. He was wondrously successful. In course of time He finished the work God gave Him to do, and He made ready to return to heaven. But before doing so He charged His disciples to be faithful to the interests He espoused. He was not going to entrust it to any hands but their own. It was a heavy task He was turning over to them, but it was not an impossible one. True He was to withdraw His visible presence, but He would be with them in a new and different way. And suddenly while they beheld He started on His journey, assuring them that after a long time He would return, and urging them in the meanwhile to be faithful.

THE NUMBER AND USE OF TALENTS

Let it be stated once more that we are not responsible for the number of talents we have, but for the use we make of them. Our faculties, resources, opportunities, are not ours by chance; they are ours by the providence and grace of God. But we are free to use them as we will; there is no coercing overlord. We may invest them or bury them; put them in circulation or squander them. What a blessing it would be to us and to others if we were to stop complaining because we do not have as great and conspicuous gifts as our neighbors, and go honestly to work with what we have! Let the original gift be what it may, we are to answer only for its increase or loss while it is in our hands. Your talent and mine is what we may serve God and our fellowmen with.

TERMINALS OR TRANSMITTERS

"Hold a bit of coal up into the sunlight and it is dark and dull; no rays of light pass through it; it is a terminal. Hold a diamond up into the sunlight and it becomes all aglow and radiant; it is a transmitter of the light and beauty it has received. Plant a stone and it is a stone forever, neither enriched itself by the gifts of soil and sunshine and rain, nor yet enriching others; it is a terminal. Plant a seed and it is nourished by the earth, warmed by the sun and refreshed by the rain until it unfolds the life within itself and turns the rich gifts it has received into beauty, wealth and fruitfulness; it is a transmitter. Heaven's gifts were never meant to terminate in the individual, but to enrich his own life and through him enrich other lives."—*Selected.*

LIKE AND UNLIKE

There are respects in which we are alike. All of us have the same number of minutes to the hour and the same number of days to the year. We have at our hand all the spiritual forces in the world, and the grace of God is free to all. We belong to the same social order, and face the same sins and the same virtues. We can all do our best.

On the other hand there are respects in which we are very different. Some are much more gifted than others. On the plane of our daily living we see that we have talents of the greatest variety and inequality. Certainly no one would care to live in a world in which we would see nothing but the dead level of equality. What indescribable monotony there would be! In variety there are interest, progress and the highest form of social order.

FAITHFULNESS REWARDED

Let us pause here a moment. We are so often wrong in our thinking at this point. It is not strength, or intellectual greatness, or fame, or wealth, but faithfulness over which God says, "Well done." What a comfort that is to us of one or two talents! We cannot do much; we move in such restricted circles; the race of life is so short; mistakes and blunders blot and blur the whole course we have come. But wait a moment. Have we been faithful? Have we honestly tried? Have we done the very best we could? Then we belong to the company of those who are honored of the Lord.

From a French writer comes this beautiful parable. One day there arrived at the gate of heaven a little unknown soul, who went straight in, without any faltering or fear. The good God assigned to it a very glorious seat, and there was a sort of murmur of astonishment among the saints. All looks were turned towards the guardian angel who had brought in the little lovely soul. The angel, bending before God, obtained permission to speak before the celestial court, and from his lips fell these words, with a noise softer than the wings of a butterfly, heard by all the heavens: "This soul has always gladly accepted its share of sunshine and shade, of trial and tears, and has never questioned anything that was according to the will of God." It is in the frank and full acceptance of God's will for our life, its discipline and its service, with all that that involves in work, in sacrifice and in struggle, that the secret of happiness lies.—*The Teachers' Monthly*.

TALENTS INCREASE WITH USE

Money makes money. The muscle that is not exercised becomes atrophied. The sickle remains bright while in the harvest field, but grows rusty when hanging in the shed. There is no other way of increasing our gifts than by putting them to work. We grow under labor. Our talents expand through investment. The bird that is out in the open, beating its wings against adverse air currents, develops remarkable strength; but the bird that is kept in a cage can scarcely fly across the room. Talents shrivel up to nothing if they are not put to use.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

What did the feast of the passover commemorate? What meal did our Lord institute to take its place? What was this meal to celebrate? What were some of the things Jesus and His disciples talked about before He entered into the garden of Gethsemane? What happened in the garden? What was the purpose of it all? How would you account for the disloyal attitude of the disciples on this occasion when He needed their friendship so much?

WHITSUNDAY

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 26: 1-75. (Print verses 31-46.)

(American Standard Revision Text)

31. Then said Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended in me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad.

32. But after I am raised up, I will go before you into Galilee.

33. But Peter answered and said unto him, If all shall be offended in thee, I will never be offended.

34. Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, that this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.

35. Peter saith unto him, Even if I must die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples.

36. Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto his disciples, Sit ye here, while I go yonder and pray.

37. And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and sore troubled.

38. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: abide ye here, and watch with me.

39. And he went forward a little, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.

40. And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them sleeping, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour?

41. Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

42. Again a second time he went away, and prayed, saying, My Father, if this cannot pass away, except I drink it, thy will be done.

43. And he came again and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy.

44. And he left them again, and went away, and prayed a third time, saying again the same words.

45. Then cometh he to the disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.

46. Arise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that betrayeth me.

GOLDEN TEXT.—He went forward a little, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.—Matthew 26: 39.

LESSON GOAL.—To consider afresh the patience and courage of Jesus as He faced the supreme task of redeeming the world from sin.

LESSON PLAN

I. FACING THE CROSS. (26: 1-29.)

1. Jesus Plotted Against.
2. Jesus Anointed.
3. Jesus Betrayed.
4. Jesus Eats the Passover.
5. Jesus Institutes the Holy Supper.

II. IN THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS. (26: 30-46.)

1. Denial Foretold.
2. The Agony of the Garden.
3. The Disciples Asleep.

III. PLACED UNDER ARREST. (26: 47-75.)

1. The Kiss of Judas.
2. The Prejudice of the Sanhedrin.
3. The Weakness of Peter.

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

Verse 36: *A place called Gethsemane.*—Generally known as the Garden of Gethsemane. The Oriental garden is usually found to be an enclosure for fruit trees. The usual garden trees are olive, pomegranate, fig, orange and lemon. There seems to be no question about the site of Gethsemane being the original one. Here we find a walled enclosure with eight aged olive trees, possibly the offspring of the trees in the garden at the time of our Lord, since it is a well-known custom of the people to propagate a new tree from the root of an old tree of historic interest.

There has always been a tax on fruit trees in Palestine, and it is known that taxes for these trees have been paid back to 636 A.D.

Flower-bordered walks, cared for by Franciscan monks, now extend around the garden, while in one corner stands a Catholic Church dedicated about six years ago.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

For almost a year Jesus had been telling His disciples that the time was approaching when He would be called upon to suffer and die. It was His wish that they might understand Him and enter into the tragic spirit of these last days. There was something in His manner and bearing that should have made it clear to them that the end was near. There was so much in His last discourses and parables that should have disabused their minds of any purpose on His part of setting up an earthly kingdom.

But nothing He could say had the effect of bringing them to see that His was not to be an earthly kingdom. They were very dull of perception when it came to their understanding of the spiritual nature of His mission. They must have seen that His enemies had become numerous and strong, and that they represented the ruling class which had great power in their hands. More than that they were insistent that this new preacher of righteousness should be put to death. The disciples were following Him more blindly than before. The scenes of today's lesson lie right in the heart of Holy Week, with Gethsemane the site of the bitterest struggle.

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

FACING THE CROSS

26:1-5. There was much counseling together during these days among the enemies of our Lord. They felt that now if ever was the time to strike. They were supposed to represent the religious forces of the nation, but they did not hesitate to lay their scruples aside and employ subtlety and the common devices of wicked men in order to put Jesus where He would not do any more preaching.

Verses 6-13. There were those who thought too much of the Master to abandon Him even in a crisis. Homes were open to Him, and behind their portals He could find shelter. The friends in Bethany always cheered His heart. Though He saw in the ointment Mary poured on Him the symbol of His death, He also saw in it that high devotion and

fine fiber of soul which would make His name known throughout the world.

Verses 14-16. The deepest shadow on His way was the treachery of Judas. For a handful of silver this man was perfectly willing to betray his Master. All he needed was some one with whom he might strike a bargain. He found occasion in the rulers who were willing to use him as a tool. The transaction was consummated.

Verses 17-25. The passover was at hand. Once more, and for the last time, Jesus would eat it. The twelve were there, with Judas, who would so far prostitute this sacred meal as to make a show of the spirit of love and brotherhood which was a thousand miles from his sordid soul. He had slipped beyond recovery.

Verses 26-29. A new era was to be introduced with a new meal, the Holy Supper, which Jesus instituted while yet at the passover table. It was to carry a new significance in that it would celebrate His death and be a means of grace to all who in the years to come would observe it as He taught. It is a feast of good things.

IN THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS

Verses 30-35. The eleven were told that they had no margin of spiritual power to draw upon. Because they had not understood that He would die they were in no sense ready for the shock of the events of the next few hours. They affirmed their loyalty and love, but they knew not whereof they spoke. They may have meant well, but that did not save them from acts of cowardice. Peter seemed to stand on his toes to affirm his unfaltering allegiance to Christ. Having sung a hymn they went forth into the moonlit streets of Jerusalem with sorrowful silence. Their destination was their trysting place—Gethsemane. They pressed on, crossed the Kidron, and ascended the slope of Olivet where was the garden into which they entered.

Verses 36-46. As these twelve stood at the entrance to the garden they must have had the appearance of a negligible little band in comparison with the armed soldiers lying in wait throughout the city to answer the summons to arrest Jesus under the direction of Judas.

Eight of the apostles were stationed at the gate of the garden so that they might give warning of any approaching danger, though we have no word from the lips of Jesus as to just what they were to do. The three of the inner circle were to go with Him a little farther, and within easy sight of Him watch and pray. He had hoped to be able to lean heavily on them as He bowed beneath the weight of the world's sin.

His physical suffering was great, but what He suffered in the depths of His soul was much greater. Luther says, "Such sorrow and terror is a proof that Christ is true man, for otherwise such sorrow could not have held Him; yet again it is testimony that He is true God, because He endured and conquered such sorrow." His agony was such as to bring Him to the verge of death. The only thing that sustained Him was the strength He gained through communion with His Father.

Going forward a short distance He fell on His knees and bowed His face to the ground. There and in that attitude He prayed with strong crying and tears. The evangelists find it hard to get the proper words with which to express the state of mind of Jesus through this crisis. His was "grief beyond utterance, a struggle beyond endurance, a horror of great darkness, a giddiness and stupefaction of soul overmastered Him, as with the sinking swoon of an anticipated death."—*Farrar*.

The only part of the prayer recorded here for us is the petition that if it be possible He might be spared drinking the bitter cup of grief and death. However that request He instantly made conditional upon the Father's will. He came to seek and save the lost by way of the cross, and He was willing to suffer even to death rather than break the eternal purpose of God that man should be saved from sin and death. The secret of all true living is the discovery and realization of the will of God for us.

Hoping to gain comfort from His disciples He returned to them, only to find them sleeping. Luke says they slept for sorrow. Perhaps they were overwhelmed by what was transpiring before their eyes. They may have been exhausted, but our Lord was not disposed to acquit them of all blame for sleeping. He needed the sympathy they could give, and which only a little time before they had promised Him. He chided them because they were not able to watch with Him one short hour. Finding no comfort from that source He returned to face the struggle alone. No less than three times He looked to them for help, but they failed Him utterly.

It was not long until it became too late for them to be of any assistance. But not only had they missed an opportunity to minister to Jesus in the hour of His deepest need, but by their sleeping when they should have been watching and praying they failed to fortify their own souls so that they could pass the night in glorious spiritual triumph. If ever men who thought they were strong found themselves pitifully weak it was the eleven on this very night.

PLACED UNDER ARREST

Verses 47-75. Judas now entered the picture. He had been keeping his tracks covered, but now he came out into the open. We could respect him more if he had not pretended to be a friend of Jesus, if he had not tried to make a black heart appear white. The kisses he rained on the Master's cheek were those of a callous traitor. He may have felt himself to be some great one for the time being, seeing he led a multitude with swords and staves. The course of events had the appearance of being very largely in his own hand. But there was one whom he did not deceive with his bland smile. Jesus saw through him, and told him to proceed with that for which he had come.

The soldiers took Jesus and bound Him and led Him away to the house of the high priest, and then He was taken into the presence of the Sanhedrin. His trial was a mockery of justice, but it was part of that burden which He came to take upon Himself.

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

WALKING CAUTIOUSLY

We have often been told that he who hesitates is lost. It is just as frequently true that he who presumes is lost. One of the most natural things in the world is for us to overestimate our strength. That is only another way of saying that we are not conscious enough of the constant need we have of the strength of Christ. Peter and John and the remainder of the disciples never thought they would deny Jesus. This was in part due to their ignorance of the severity of the temptation they were about to face; it was also in part due to their failure to fathom their own weakness. They had enthusiasm enough, but they lacked the courage that comes through long, hard testings. Wordsworth rightly says that the Church will go forward in the future as it has in the past through the foolishness of men and the wisdom of God. We have made sufficient mistakes to wreck it, but God has overruled these to His glory.

A GETHSEMANE FOR ME

Is it too much to say that there is a Gethsemane for each of us? Perhaps we have not yet overtaken it. Possibly all our days have been bright and pleasant, and all of life's gifts to our liking. But a place of trial and suffering stands along the way of each soul. It may be a Gethsemane of exacting care, of struggle against poverty, of personal suffering or of loss by death, of battle against some sin that has been master in our lives, of disappointment and despair, of discipline to bring us under the will of God. Many of our readers know these by hard experience. It is no dull or far-off theory to them. To every pastor more than one has said, "I have passed through my Gethsemane." But in that fierce battle we have a friend on whom we may rely.

THE PLACE OF PRAYER IN TROUBLE

We have often had occasion to remark on the prayer life of Jesus. But never before did we see Him enter into communion with His Father so troubled, disturbed and depressed. His sorrow was like death itself. What could He do at such a time? The sin of the whole world was on Him. He could pray, and He did pray. He understood perfectly well that His Father would hear. Never yet had He supplicated His Father in vain. That is a lesson well worth learning. Trouble is the bell that summons us to the altar stairs of prayer. It encourages us to look up and see how wide open are the windows of heaven. The Gethsemane chapter cannot be read without our feeling that God is a very present help in trouble.

THE GARDEN AND OUR SIN

The evangelists do not have much to say in regard to connecting our sins with the suffering of Christ in the garden. For that matter they do not elaborately connect the two on the cross; I mean in the gospels. That is, they tell the whole story in narrative form without introducing their own interpretation of the events. They make no effort at that point to embellish what actually happened. The interpretation and expo-

sition belong rather to the epistles which take more of the form of doctrinal teaching. But putting the gospels and the epistles together, as we should always do, can there be any doubt of the place of Gethsemane in that bitter cup which He was called upon to drink for us? When we see Him suffering anywhere at any time it must be with a deep consciousness of the stripes which our sins inflicted upon Him.

THE WILL THAT PREVAILS

All true prayer ends with "Not what I will, but what Thou wilt," if not in words, at least in spirit. It does not command God, but joyfully submits to Him. Prayer would be our ruin if we were to get what we ask. He may accept our prayer though it be very foolish and even selfish, but His answer will be according to His perfect wisdom.

I recall now an impressive story told me long ago by a widowed mother concerning herself. She had three boys, and was as proud of them as any mother could be. They ranged in years from six to fourteen. Two of them were stricken with fever at almost the same time. The best medical skill was employed, but to no purpose. They grew worse and death claimed them both. In a little while the third boy went down with the same disease. Again everything was done that could be done. The physicians announced to the mother one morning that the case was hopeless. She became desperate. She declared she could not give up her last boy. She took the case to God, but did not say "Thy will be done," but, "I want my will done." In her prayer she told God if her boy was not spared she would leave the church, despise religion and never pray again. The lad's life was spared. But within ten years she wished that God had taken him when he was a boy. His life was such that she had perpetual sorrow. Her days were shortened because of him.

THE PRIVILEGE OF BEING FRIENDS

Some years ago a woman was to undergo an operation. Two of her closest friends agreed that they would be in prayer for her while she was on the operating table. That is not an excessive claim for one in suffering to make on friends. It is not too much for friends to want to give. It means everything for us to know that others are standing by, watching and praying. More joy will come into life when we have deeper feelings of sympathy for one another.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

What did Judas do with the money he received for betraying Jesus? Who was the Roman governor before whom Jesus was tried? What prisoner was released instead of Jesus at the feast of the passover? What word did the wife of Pilate send to him? If Jesus was innocent why did Pilate consent to His crucifixion?

Where was Jesus crucified? What inscription was placed over His cross? What was the ground of His accusation? In the railings of the chief priests how did they show they misunderstood Him? Can you quote several sayings of Jesus on the cross? If He had all power why did He permit Himself to be nailed to the cross?

TRINITY SUNDAY

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 27:1-66. (Print verses 33-50.)

(American Standard Revision Text)

33. And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, The place of a skull,

34. they gave him wine to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted it, he would not drink.

35. And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments among them, casting lots;

36. and they sat and watched him there.

37. And they set up over his head his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

38. Then are there crucified with him two robbers, one on the right hand and one on the left.

39. And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads,

40. and saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself: if thou art the Son of God, come down from the cross.

41. In like manner also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said,

42. He saved others; himself he cannot save. He is the King of Israel;

let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe on him.

43. He trusteth on God; let him deliver him now, if he desireth him: for he said, I am the Son of God.

44. And the robbers also that were crucified with him cast upon him the same reproach.

45. Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour.

46. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

47. And some of them that stood there, when they heard it, said, This man calleth Elijah.

48. And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink.

49. And the rest said, Let be; let us see whether Elijah cometh to save him.

50. And Jesus cried again with a loud voice, and yielded up his spirit.

GOLDEN TEXT: Looking unto Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising shame, and hath sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.—Hebrews 12:2.

LESSON GOAL.—To face again the fact of sin and the suffering of Jesus, in order to come to a clearer understanding of what the cross means to a sinful world.

LESSON PLAN

I. JESUS BEFORE PILATE. (27:11-32.)

1. The Governor.
2. Barabbas.
3. The Soldiers.

II. JESUS ON THE CROSS. (27:33-56.)

1. Bodily Pain.
2. Mental Agony.

III. JESUS LAID IN THE TOMB. (27:57-66.)

1. The Body of Jesus Buried.
2. The Tomb Guarded.

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

Verse 33: *The place of a skull.*—Outside Jerusalem is a mound which was used in the time of the Romans as a public execution ground.

Standing on the walls of Jerusalem, near the Damascus gate, and looking toward this mound, one can see great cavities in the rock which resemble the sockets of eyes, the mound itself suggesting the form of a skull.

Verse 35: *They parted his garments among them, casting lots.*—The garments were the perquisites of the executioners. They were the headdress, the sandals, the outer garment and the girdle, one article for each. Who should receive the seamless inner garment was determined by lot.

Verse 48: *Put it on a reed and gave him to drink.*—A reed was a long straight cane often twenty feet in length. One of the men, having heard Jesus say, "I thirst," ran and took a sponge and dipped it in the sour wine used by the Romans. The cross was on a slight elevation so that it was only necessary to put the sponge on a short reed in order to reach his mouth.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

We should locate ourselves, if we are to follow the first trials of Jesus, in the small hours of Friday morning in Holy Week. Our Lord was arrested in the garden by armed soldiers from Jerusalem, bound and led away to Annas, who for about nine years had been high priest of the Jews, but was deposed by the Roman government. The present high priest was Caiaphas, son-in-law of Annas. Because of the popularity of Annas among the Jews, and further because of his relation to the present high priest, it can easily be understood that he exercised powerful influence. Doubtless Caiaphas was under his control and did his bidding.

It would be interesting to know the part these two men played in the persecution and final arrest of Jesus. There is scarcely any room to doubt that they were at the heart of the official party that was determined to rid the land of Him. They received large revenues from the temple worshipers, and had become immensely wealthy. To the extent that the preaching of Jesus denounced the formal and paralyzing worship that was usually carried on in the temple, to that extent He withdrew funds from the pockets of these men. Their hostility toward Him therefore may well be understood.

Jesus underwent three so-called trials at the hands of the Jewish authorities. The first was under Annas, deposed high priest; the second was under Caiaphas, high priest; and the third was before the Sanhedrin, which had been suddenly and unlawfully called together to sanction the verdict of the two officials who had pronounced Him guilty. Rome when it came into power in Palestine took from the Jews the authority to inflict the death penalty. Therefore to have Him put to death it was necessary for them to receive the sanction of the Roman government, and this they proceeded to get by leading their prisoner to Pilate, the Roman governor of their land.

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

JESUS BEFORE PILATE

Verses 11-32. While the Roman headquarters in Palestine were located in Cæsarea, Pilate, during the great Jewish feast, took up his residence at Jerusalem in order to quell any disturbance that might arise. All the Jews needed to do then was to take Jesus from one official building to another in the same city, and the distance was not great. Pilate had been governor only four or five years when he was asked to try Jesus.

The questions he asked our Saviour show him to have been uncertain and lacking in convictions. He was a time-server, and less concerned about justice being done than he was that he should be popular with the people and assured of his position. He listened to the accusations brought against Jesus by the Jews, and asked the prisoner a few questions based thereon. Jesus answered them as He saw fit. What amazed Pilate was that Jesus did not try to confound the Jews for their false charges with noisy denials. He possessed a quiet dignity the like of which the governor had never before seen.

Now Rome had a custom of releasing one prisoner at the feast of the passover, the purpose being to render her rule less offensive. The choice of the prisoner to be released seemed to lie somewhat with the people. In this case the lot seemed to fall between Jesus and Barabbas. Pilate nominated Jesus, but the crowd cried out for Barabbas, not that they hated Barabbas less but Jesus more. A murderer was voted his release, a Saviour His condemnation.

The soldiers of the governor played their part too. It gives us an insight into the barbarous customs of the times. That they should be permitted to treat Jesus the way they did seems almost unbelievable. The governor himself was most to blame for it. "The conduct of Pilate in permitting the gross indignities now offered to Jesus shows that while his conscience had been alarmed and his fears awakened previously no pure and elegant feelings dwelt in his heart."

JESUS ON THE CROSS

Verses 33-56. Judas, Annas, Caiaphas, the Sanhedrin, Herod and Pilate were the chief offenders in the drama which led to the crucifixion of our Saviour. The soldiers were the human instruments for the carrying out of their will. When the prisoner was turned over to them they laid the beams of the cross on his shoulders and started to Calvary with Him. But having become exhausted from the trials and scourging, and from the mental anguish, He had not gone far when He fell beneath the weight of the cross. Simon of Cyrene appeared at that moment and him they compelled to carry the cross to the place of execution.

"It was a merciful Jewish practice to give to those led to execution a draught of strong wine mixed with myrrh, so as to deaden consciousness. This charitable office was performed at the cost of, if not by, an association of women in Jerusalem. This draught was offered Jesus when He reached Golgotha. But having tasted it and ascertained its character and object, He would not drink it. It was like His former refusal of the pity of the 'daughters of Jerusalem.'"—*Dr. Edersheim.*

According to another custom of the times the clothing of the condemned man became the property of the executioners. The outer garments, like the headpiece, the cloak, the girdle, and the sandals, were divided among them. But the tunic, or inner garment, which was woven throughout in one piece, and which would be useless if rent asunder, they cast lots for.

The crime of which the victim was guilty was written on a white tablet, and this in turn fastened to the upright piece of the cross at the top. The gospel writers vary in their wording of this accusation, but the substance in all is the same.

As we view the scene we behold the patient Christ, the two profane and protesting robbers, the cold and calculating executioners, the mocking and railing Jews, and the sympathetic and tearful women. One wonders if Jesus suffered as much from the nails as He did from the jeers and the inexcusable calumnies of His enemies. They got hold of half truth and hurled them with their blasphemous interpretations into His teeth. They pretended to be in a frame of mind to believe on Him if He would work a miracle and come down from the cross. Though there were hundreds of people standing by who could have testified that He saved them in body and soul, His enemies laughed at His "cures" and challenged Him to prove He had such power by delivering Himself.

Jesus was nailed to the cross at nine A. M. and died at three P. M. There was darkness over the land during the last three hours. "This is the first intimation that Christ's execution was essentially different from that of others. It was no mere fortuitous eclipse of the sun, as an eclipse at the time of the passover full moon would be impossible, but a supernatural veiling of nature's eyes to the cruelty of mankind. Dionysius, the Areopagite (at that time a heathen), is reported to have seen the darkness and to have exclaimed, 'Either God is suffering, and the world is suffering with Him, or else the world is hurrying to destruction.'"—*Dr. G. L. Robinson.*

At no other time did Jesus more completely identify Himself with sinful man than when He cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" He appears to have lost the consciousness of the presence and help of His Father and to have felt all the weight and penalty of sin roll over His soul. Whatever may have been thought by most of those present, one, controlled by a pitying impulse, filled a sponge with a stupefying beverage and placed it to His lips to ease His suffering. Shortly afterward Jesus yielded up His spirit to His Father. He died because He chose to die. The centurion and others with him were so impressed with the quiet dignity of Jesus through this awful ordeal that they declared it their belief that this man was the Son of God.

JESUS LAID IN THE TOMB

Joseph, a rich man of Arimathea, was a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and begged the body while it yet remained on the cross. It had to be removed hurriedly for the Sabbath was approaching. Permission was granted. Joseph was in a position to give the body honorable burial, as he wished to do, but he knew he would have to defer adequate embalming until the Sabbath had passed. Taking new "linen clothes" or bandages, and using spices with them, he and Nicodemus wrapped them around the body and laid it in the tomb. That done, they rolled a great stone against the door of the tomb and departed. At the

solicitation of priests and Pharisees Pilate had the tomb sealed and a guard stationed before it.

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

THE PRELIMINARY STEPS

We have seen how Jesus suffered in the garden, when He sweat as it were great drops of blood. We are now witnessing His pain of body and anguish of spirit on the cross. But did He not suffer almost as much under the successive trials to which He was subjected? When He beheld the chicanery, the sophistry, the trickery, the lying, did He not suffer? When He beheld judges, who were supposed to be staunch defenders of the truth, playing with that truth and toying with their consciences, did He not suffer? When He beheld them catering to public opinion in order that they might maintain their seats among the mighty, did He not suffer? When He beheld reputed religious leaders more zealous for temple revenues and temporary security than for the spiritual freedom of the people, did He not suffer?

THE CHOICE OF THE CROSS

We are disposed to read this narrative as though no one had a voice in the tragedy of Calvary except the enemies of our Saviour. As the story is told they seem to have been active and He passive. If one stays to the surface of the record that is the impression he is liable to get. They condemned Him; they mocked Him; they led Him out to the hill; they nailed Him to the cross of wood; they railed at Him and challenged Him to show His power. Does it not seem that they rather than He had the power?

At the same time we are forced to add this: Jesus went to Calvary of His own will. It was also the will of His Father. That is what He came into the world to suffer. Now we must weave the divine purpose and the human treachery together, for they belong together. He laid down His life of His own accord. No man had the power to take it from Him unless He had yielded.

WHEN SOUND ARGUMENTS FAIL

When a man wants evidence he proceeds in logical, natural ways to get it. He does not give up his quest until he finds it. He reads books; he consults his own experience; he inquires of others; he brings all the powers of his reason into play. But if a man does not want evidence it is practically impossible to convince him of anything. When Jesus was on trial His enemies brought to the witness stand a few none too scrupulous men and asked them questions. But their testimony did not agree. But that made no difference, for those in authority condemned Jesus anyway. When He was on the cross they challenged Him to show the power of which He boasted. But there were witnesses everywhere. Did they want evidence, or were they afraid they would get it? There were scores of trustworthy witnesses right in that group who

would have told how He made them see, how He made them hear, how He cleansed them of leprosy, how He forgave them their sins and set them at peace with God. Did they want evidence, or were they fooling themselves?

THE CROSS A REVEALER

In the cross we see the love of God. God so loved the world that He gave His Son for just such sacrifice as this. If that love had been any less than it was there would have been no cross and no salvation.

The cross reveals the depths of sin. Who can believe that Jesus would have been driven to the cross if there had been any other way to rescue us from the guilt and dominion of sin? The Bible from one cover to the other leaves only one impression. It was needful that Jesus should die. We question the necessity of it if it were to serve only as an example.

The cross reveals the worth of the human soul. And no person ever magnified that worth as Jesus did. In His sight it was of more value than all the world besides. If man is nothing more than a fugitive atom in a limitless world then the cross is without meaning. But before God man seemed worthy of Christ's sacrifice on Calvary.

THE WAY OF SUFFERING

From all we know Jesus could have come down from the cross. It would not have been a greater display of power than the people witnessed many times at His hand. But what would have been the consequences of such a course? The word redemption would have lost its meaning. His enemies said they would then believe in Him. But what is the virtue of believing in one who has run away from duty? It is faith in a crucified Christ that has vitality. The way of service leads through suffering.

Several years ago a terrible flood came rushing down a valley in the far west. There was a little telephone operator at Folsom, N. Mex., who rescued forty families from drowning by staying at her post and warning the people of their peril. She had ample time to escape, but instead of doing so, she took the directory and called up the number of each name in order and said: "Pack up and leave at once; flood is coming down the valley." She was still at her sweet task like that of an angel when the waters took her away to her death. Her body was found twelve miles away, the headgear worn by operators still fastened to her head. Some thirty others were lost, but fully one hundred and fifty were saved who would have been drowned if she had left her post and saved herself.—*Selected.*

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

Did the disciples believe that Jesus would rise from the dead? Why not? Can you recall any occasion on which He said plainly that He would rise again? Who were the first to come to the tomb on Sunday morning? What did they find? How was the news spread? Were the disciples quick or slow to believe? What arguments were advanced by His enemies to show that He had not risen? What is the great commission?

THE RISEN LORD AND THE GREAT COMMISSION

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 28: 1-20. (Print verses 1-10, 16-20.)

(American Standard Revision Text)

1. Now late on the sabbath day, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.

2. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled away the stone, and sat upon it.

3. His appearance was as lightning, and his raiment white as snow:

4. and for fear of him the watchers did quake, and became as dead men.

5. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye; for I know that ye seek Jesus, who hath been crucified.

6. He is not here; for he is risen, even as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.

7. And go quickly, and tell his disciples, He is risen from the dead; and lo, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you.

8. And they departed quickly from

the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring his disciples word.

9. And behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and took hold of his feet, and worshipped him.

10. Then saith Jesus unto them, Fear not: go tell my brethren that they depart unto Galilee, and there shall they see me.

16. But the eleven disciples went into Galilee, unto the mountain where Jesus had appointed them.

17. And when they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted.

18. And Jesus came to them and spake unto them, saying, All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth.

19. Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit:

20. teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations.—
Matthew 28: 19.

LESSON GOAL.—To make vivid the story of the resurrection and to see how it relates to the great commission.

LESSON PLAN

I. THE LIVING CHRIST. (28: 1-15.)

1. The Visit of the Women.
2. The Message of the Angel.
3. The Good News Carried.
4. The Bargaining of the Sanhedrin.

II. THE COMMISSIONING CHRIST. (28: 16-20.)

1. The Place.
2. The Authority.
3. The Means.
4. The Divine Presence.

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

Verse 1: *As it began to dawn toward the first day of the week.*—The days of the week, except the Sabbath, or seventh day, were distinguished only by their order, as first day, second day, third day, etc.

The Jews, in reckoning time, counted a part of a day as a whole

day. Since Jesus died on the afternoon of Friday and arose on Sunday morning, he lay in the tomb three days according to their reckoning.

Verse 1: *To see the sepulchre*.—Burying places were always outside the city. No public highway or watercourse was allowed to pass through them. Private burying places were in caves in gardens. These rock-hewn sepulchres consisted of a room with a lower cave in which the bodies were placed in hewn-out niches.

Verse 2: *And rolled away the stone*.—The sealing of tombs with either a rectangular or circular shaped stone seems to have been common throughout the East.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

On Friday afternoon toward sunset the body of Jesus was taken from the cross, hastily prepared for burial and laid away in the new tomb of Joseph of Arimathæa, which was just outside the walls of the city. The Jewish Sabbath began at Sunset Friday, and no work was permitted for a period of twenty-four hours. The completion of the embalming of the body was deferred until Sunday morning.

Joseph and Nicodemus had been secret disciples of Jesus, but their sense of right and justice had been so outraged by the attitude of the rulers toward Jesus in condemning Him and putting Him to death that they openly allied themselves with Him and His cause. That they should accord the honors of suitable burial to Him exposed them to danger, but they did not care.

The death of our Lord was a terrific blow to the hopes of the disciples. They were crushed. Instantly they began to scatter. They had no thought of attempting to carry on the work He had started. In their present state of mind, and with their views of a temporal kingdom still beclouding their vision, they were in no condition to make any advance.

The enemies of Jesus outwardly were riotously happy. They had nailed Him to the cross. Their schemes had prevailed. They had matched their wits with His and came off victorious. Still they were not altogether at peace. They remembered that He said He would arise again. They did not believe it, and yet they did. There was a most uncomfortable position. Now we are to see what took place.

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

THE LIVING CHRIST

28:1-15. The visit of the women. Any curiosity that wants an explanation of the resurrection must go unsatisfied. The thread of history was broken when Jesus was laid in the tomb, and it was not taken up again until after He had risen. There is a gap there which we are not able to fill. The fact of the resurrection is briefly told, and there it ends. No writer makes an attempt to explain the event.

"Late on the sabbath day," and "as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week," seem to be very inconsistent phrases. The first refers to Saturday evening, and the second to Sunday morning. Perhaps the evangelist means to say that as soon as the Sabbath had ended the women began getting ready to perform the last rites upon the body of their Lord by purchasing the necessary spices. It is not probable they visited the tomb until Sunday morning. While they may have begun to appreciate that freedom from Jewish legalism which Jesus taught, we are not to suppose that with their Master dead they would venture far in the exercise of that freedom.

One thing that troubled the women was the presence of a large stone they had seen Joseph and Nicodemus roll against the mouth of the tomb. They may also have learned that the Roman seal had been placed upon it. What must have been their surprise on their arrival to find the door of the tomb open! For the time being they did not know what had happened. They certainly did not suspect that the occupant of the tomb had risen.

The message of the angel. In some instances only one angel is mentioned, in others two. Where only one the spokesman is doubtless referred to. He presented the second surprise to the women. He was not guarding the tomb, for there was nothing to guard. The tomb was open not to let Jesus out, but to show that it was empty and to admit the women. The bright appearance of the angel must have reminded the women of what they had heard of the appearance of Jesus at the transfiguration. They identified him as a messenger of the heavenly host.

What he said to the women, even though they did not comprehend the length and breadth of it, began to stir within them a new hope. They had been sure that He was dead. They did not anticipate that they would see Him alive again. New light began to break. They were willing to listen and to conform their views to the evidence that would be produced. They assumed an obedient attitude. They had an open mind, though it would require strong testimony to make them confident that He was alive. The angel not only said that the tomb was empty; he said it was empty because Jesus had risen.

The good news carried. The angel had no sooner informed the anxious and frightened women that their Saviour had risen than he told them to carry the good news to the other sorrowing believers; and they were to do it quickly. A fact of such importance was not to be held back. So far the apostles had not thought it worth while to return to the tomb. Their Friend was dead. They were alone in the world. It would be hard to describe the feelings of the women as they started on their errand. Half believing, half unbelieving, half overcome with joy, half overcome with fright, they hastened to bring the disciples word.

And they were not unrewarded. For as they were on their way the risen Lord appeared to them. This may have been His second appearance, having been seen of Mary Magdalene before. He greeted them with "All hail." or "Rejoice." Then and there the women poured out their heart's devotion to Him. He repeated the words of the angel, that they should tell the disciples to go into Galilee where they would see Him.

The bargaining of the Sanhedrin. The guards, frightened at what they had seen, hastened into the city to report to the rulers. "They relate the fact to the chief priests and elders and are bribed by them to report that the disciples of Jesus came by night and stole His body while they themselves slept. There is an element of absurdity in this

explanation. If the soldiers were asleep, how do they know who came, or what was done in the night? Yet is this statement more ridiculous than any modern explanation of the empty tomb which denies the resurrection of Christ?"

THE COMMISSIONING CHRIST

Verses 16-20. *The place.* The verses which tell us of the bargaining of the priests with the guards are in the nature of a parenthetical expression, and for that reason verse 16 should be carried back and joined to verse 10. The women carried the command of Jesus to the disciples that they should go into Galilee where He was to manifest Himself to the largest number of people who were to see Him alive, for this may have been the occasion when He showed Himself to five hundred at one time (I Cor. 15:6). Not all were ready to believe. Some desired more evidence.

The authority. This word here means both power and authority. He has both the ability and the right to rule. And He did not limit these to the people who bore the name *Jews*. He did not hesitate to say that all nations were to come under His dominion. The risen Christ is clothed with all the power we need to bring the whole world to His feet. Any weakness we may show is not in that direction.

The means. Jesus knew that He was about to return to His throne in heaven. He would henceforth carry on through His disciples. And He did not leave them without a program. First, they were not to limit their field, for He did not limit it. Second, they were to make disciples of all nations by baptizing and teaching them. It is clearly seen that the field in His view is the world, Jew and Gentile, bond and free, male and female, young and old. All were to be gathered, for He had made provision for all in the economy of His redemption. The sacrament by which disciples are to be admitted is baptism, through which sins are forgiven and new life bestowed.

But baptism is not enough. The subjects of baptism are to be taught the doctrines of the precious faith, that they may grow into holiness of life and produce good works. The substance of the teaching they were to impart was what Jesus had commanded them.

The divine presence. It was a difficult task Jesus had assigned the eleven, and it was a bold program they were to see fulfilled. But it was not their work alone. Jesus had not become disinterested because He had completed His work on the earth and gone back to heaven. They would not be alone. He had been with them for three years, and His presence would continue to go with them, though in a different manner. It would be the same person, having the same power, and able to work effectually in and through them.

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

RESURRECTION ANALOGIES

The resurrection of Jesus may be illustrated by what we see and know of life about us. There is sleep, for instance. Jesus called death

a sleep. We lie down at night weary, seeking rest and renewal. We believe we shall awake in the morning. Death is a sleep out of which we shall awake.

Then there are the fields and the gardens from which we may gather a lesson. In the fall all nature seems dead. The leaves have fallen. The many branches are bare, and seem dead. Every evidence of life has disappeared. In the spring, however, that which seemed lifeless puts forth abundant life. The bare earth is covered with verdure.

But after all we have nowhere a perfect analogy of the resurrection of our Lord. That event stands alone. It is unique in all the range of nature and history.

THE FACT OF THE RESURRECTION

It is a fact, and a stubborn fact. It refuses to be denied. "The most familiar, modern denials of the resurrection are borrowed from dead skeptics. Is it probable that the body of Jesus was stolen and that He never arose from the dead? Then His disciples were imposters; His own claims were false; and His Church has been built on a falsehood. There is no reason for denying the fact which is the foundation of our Christian faith. There is no other reasonable explanation of the empty tomb." The circumstances attending the resurrection were such natural ones as to produce immediate faith. It was just like Jesus to do so. It was in keeping with the majesty of His earthly career. It does not seem reasonable that a life like His could be blotted out by a few enemies. "But now is Christ risen from the dead."

THE CONQUERING CHRIST

He manifested the spirit of triumph all through His life. He laid the foundations of a kingdom that has never been destroyed. His name is the guarantee of its perpetuity. Even when He was laid in the grave it was not so much as the victim of death as the conqueror of death. Death, the grave and all the powers of darkness could not hold Him.

"I always like to see a good picture. I do not know anything except a good book that does a man more good, and some years ago, when I was in Paris, I went to the salon. One picture represented a man, a king, lying on his death-bed. He was just dead; his face had the appearance of life, and his servants who a moment before would have fled at his word, were engaged in rifling his caskets and wardrobes. What do you think was the legend beneath? 'William the Conqueror.' Such a victory! Just a moment dead, and his own servants were spoiling him. Another picture represented a man lying in a rocky tomb, also dead, but the angels were keeping watch, and to that tomb, now empty, all ages and all generations are coming. He was the Conqueror."—*John Watson.*

CONSEQUENT RESPONSIBILITY

Grant that Jesus died and rose again, that He now lives, and is conqueror over all our enemies, and there rests on us a responsibility

surpassing all others. Among the first words of the angel and Jesus were these: "Go and tell." The death and resurrection of Jesus without the great commission would have been useless; and the great commission without the death and resurrection would have been futile. The two are inseparable parts of one program, and the person who attempts to divide them does so at his own peril.

THE AUTHORITY OF THE GREAT COMMISSION

It is Jesus who says to the Church, "Go." And He has all power and all authority. He does not say, "Go, if you feel like it," or, "Go, if you have nothing else to do," or, "Go, if My program sufficiently commends itself to you." We are to go, and all excuses and alibis are to be put aside. Our Lord, who owns us and all we have, issues the command. Our Lord, whose is the kingdom and the power and the glory, bids us be about our Father's business.

THE INCLUSIVENESS OF THE GREAT COMMISSION

This inclusiveness looks in two directions. In the first place it means that all of us Christians are to be missionaries in the best sense of the word. We cannot all go, but we can all help along the project. There is no use trying to deceive ourselves by any artifice that the great commission does not include us. It includes us as certainly as redemption on the cross includes us.

In the second place the inclusiveness of the great commission is seen in the scope of the fields that are to be reached by it. Some people are perfectly willing that a few parts of the earth should be advised of the way of salvation Jesus provided, but they do not believe in overdoing it. He is a marvelous juggler with words who can construe this command of our Lord so as to rule out one-half of the nations from any logical claim upon the fruits of Christ's redemptive work.

THE ASSURED SUCCESS OF THE GREAT COMMISSION

Where does that success lie? What chance have we of winning the world to anything worth while unless the presence of Jesus goes with us? He knew how imperative was that promise if the work He assigned the infant Church was ever to get done. And we go out in the spirit of high courage because we are confident that we do not go alone. But is it not true that many sincere believers have been carrying on ignorant of the fact that their Saviour is nearer than hands and feet? What we shall absolutely fail to do alone we can do with joy and assured victory if we take Him with us.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

What chapters in Matthew do the lessons of this quarter cover? Would it be correct to say that the thought the Saviour most emphasized during the last year of His life was His approaching death? Under what two topics has the Lesson Committee suggested the review be discussed? What are some of the main thoughts you developed during the quarter? Which ones have you reason to believe most interested and impressed your class? If your pupils are above twelve or fourteen years of age what is their relation to the church?

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

DEVOTIONAL READING: Matthew 5: 1-16.

(American Standard Revision Text)

1. And seeing the multitudes, he went up into the mountain: and when he had sat down, his disciples came unto him:

2. and he opened his mouth and taught them, saying,

3. Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

5. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

6. Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

7. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

8. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

9. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called sons of God.

10. Blessed are they that have been persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11. Blessed are ye when *men* shall reproach you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

12. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets that were before you.

13. Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost its savor, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men.

14. Ye are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid.

15. Neither do *men* light a lamp, and put it under the bushel, but on the stand; and it shineth unto all that are in the house.

16. Even so let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.—Matthew 16: 16.

LESSON GOAL.—To learn through a review of the lessons of the quarter the meaning of Christian discipleship.

LESSON PLAN

1. Lesson Titles.
2. Lesson Goals.
3. Lesson Plans.
4. Time and Place.
5. Suggestions for Review.

LESSON TITLES

The first thing the teacher should do in preparation for the review is to read over the titles of the lessons for the quarter. The same thing should be done a second and a third time. The International Committee, charged with the choice of the lessons, feels that there is a logical sequence in the lessons from the first to the last. Is that apparent to you? Do you not think that a logical as well as a chronological arrangement was apparent to the mind of Matthew who wrote this Gospel?

If you will so acquaint yourself with the titles of the twelve lessons that as soon as your eye falls on them they serve to call to your mind what the lessons contain you will be tremendously helped in the presentation you are to make; and you will be helped none the less if you

have planned to have others share in the review. You cannot afford taking the time to look up during the brief period at your disposal what you may desire to bring out. The reviews are usually annoying because there is lack of preparation. I do not believe that any man would say that the outlook from the top of the mountain is least desirable unless he is too lazy to climb to the top. A survey of the lessons of any quarter ought to prove the most fruitful hour we spend together.

LESSON GOALS

The writers of this book have taken time to work out what they consider a desirable goal for each lesson. As you look over these goals do you think they are comprehensive enough? Do you think they are definite enough? Would you like to recast any of them? You will not want to spend much time on that, but possibly it will clarify your own thinking if you were to restate some of them so as to bring them more into harmony with the thought that most impressed you.

Does the Lesson Goal of the review to your mind sum up in an adequate manner the substance of the teachings of the quarter? Or have you arrived at some other form of words that may bring before the pupils in your class what you have tried to impress upon them in these studies? It is not to be supposed that all minds will run in the same groove, or lay hold of the same truths in the same way. That in itself would be far from ideal. Think for yourself, and try to get your pupils to think also. There is room for difference in the points of view we take. Let us beware of dead uniformity.

LESSON PLANS

You are now ready to take up the Lesson Plans. They have been introduced in order to create pegs on which to hang the truths of the several lessons. They are not easily developed, nor is any uniformity of style sought. They have been made rather brief in form so that they might stick in the mind better. They are intended to serve as guides, but no one desires that they shall be used slavishly.

As you take up lesson after lesson do the Lesson Plans help to clarify your thinking? Are they suggestive of avenues of thought, and interpretative of the Scripture they are intended to carry? It ought to be true that, with them alone, you are offered enough material, and in such form as will equip you for the study period.

TIME AND PLACE

With the first lesson of the quarter we enter on the last of the three periods of the Galilean ministry, when He withdrew, accompanied by His disciples, into northern Galilee that He might be alone with them for a time. We can with a fair degree of accuracy locate that event somewhere between ten and twelve months prior to His crucifixion, or in the spring of A. D. 29.

He left Galilee and entered upon His Perea ministry probably in November of that same year. He died on the cross at the passover season A. D. 30.

While Jesus was on the go all the time, He was frequently found retracing His steps, for the land in which He spent His life was not large. He moved from place to place so that as many people as possible might have the opportunity of hearing the Gospel. In order that preparation for His coming might be made He sent His disciples out two by two to get them ready for His visit.

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE REVIEW

The Committee choosing these lessons suggests that we discuss the review around two topics, first, "What Shall I Do with Jesus?" and second, "The Meaning of Christian Discipleship." Perhaps it will be profitable for us to consider the lessons, not one by one, but under this topical arrangement.

WHAT SHALL I DO WITH JESUS

It is highly desirable that we think of the content of these lessons as making a personal appeal and challenge. It need hardly be suggested to any of us that one of our perils in handling spiritual truths lies in the tendency to think of them as unrelated to anything we are or do. A difficulty Jesus faced was of the same nature; that is, He discovered that many people who listened to Him were willing to discuss almost any subject He presented, but they were not so willing to build it into their own lives and adjust it to their own conduct and faith.

In the first lesson of the quarter we find Him saying to the twelve, "Who say ye that I am?" Apparently they had not previously told Him, or given Him a clear judgment of His person and work. They had been with Him a year and a half or more, and it was to be expected that by that time they had matured enough in thought to give expression to their faith. Naturally what they thought of Jesus would determine what they would do with Him. They were ready to make a decision, and they were not ashamed to do so. There is every evidence that the Lord was pleased with their confession of faith in His divine origin and ministry, for He at once proceeded to tell them how they had come by that faith and what place they had in the kingdom which would never be destroyed.

When our Lord made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem He gave the people another opportunity to declare themselves in favor of His kingly rule. And we do find them lining up on one side or the other. Some greeted Him with their hosannas and saw in Him the Messiah whose coming had been foretold by the prophets. They paid Him homage and made the city ring with their praises. But there were those also who frowned upon the deference that was being shown Him. Had it not been for the multitudes gathered about the temple, whose opinion they feared, they would have taken steps to put Him to death.

What shall we do with Jesus? It is apparent in all the gospels, but most of all in that written by John, that as Jesus progressed with His ministry there was an increasingly sharp line drawn between those who stood for Him and those who stood against Him. It was scarcely possible for any one to be absolutely neutral. If we could have had the

privilege of moving among the crowds He addressed from time to time, we would have been able to read on the faces of most of His hearers the attitude they took toward Him. Here would have been the kindly look, the tender feeling, the expression of keen interest, the eager waiting upon His words. There would have been the hard look, the cynical glance of the eye, a certain restlessness, the twitching of the lips and fingers.

The attitude of friendliness or unfriendliness may have been seen also in the way they asked questions of Him. If they really desired to know the truth and to gain some help on the problems of life they came in an uncritical frame of mind. They had nothing to conceal. They were open and frank with Him. If there was one thing Jesus enjoyed it was to set the soul at rest that honestly sought Him.

In a course of lessons of this kind the teacher should have a very definite aim. It is not enough to tell the truth, to be sure that he is orthodox, or to cover so many points in a given time. He should seek to lead his pupils into fellowship with Christ, and to give them to understand that if they are not for Him they are against Him. The neutral position is the one that is so often assumed. Young people and adults have the feeling that there is a certain amount of virtue accruing from their mere presence in the school. The commitment of their own lives more and more to Jesus is the thing to be sought after.

Again we raise the question in its varied forms: What have I done with Jesus? What am I doing with Jesus? What shall I do with Jesus?

He did not come into the world to make an indifferent appeal for our love; and He did not come at a slight sacrifice to claim our loyalty. If His coming had been a mere gesture we would not be moved by it. But He came to make that total and far-reaching sacrifice which was necessary to redeem us from sin and to present us faultless before the presence of God's glory, and for that reason He has a right to the heart's devotion.

"Suppose that you are rowing a boat on a river, in no danger of any kind. A friend comes down to the shore and hails you; he tells you that he intends to give his life for you. So he throws himself into the water and is drowned. Are you impressed with gratitude and love? Is the evidence of love and devotion so manifest and indubitable that you cannot doubt it? Does it not seem more like a vain showing of heroism, a display made not so much for your sake as for the sake of him who made it?

"But if your boat had been sinking? Ah, then it would have been another matter. The man who gives up his life to rescue you from an actual peril commands your love because he is your saviour. The crown of love is service. The glory of love is usefulness. The love of Christ, the sacrifice of Christ, draw their deepest power upon the inner life of man from the conviction that they really have accomplished deliverance for sinners from the guilt, and curse, and doom of sin."—*Henry van Dyke*.

THE MEANING OF CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

If we go back to the early Church we shall find that the appreciation of what it means to be a Christian was a growth. Certainly the twelve themselves found it a long and slow process. They were not instantly matured and full-grown Christians. They stumbled and fell, got up and went forward, and thus they were able to approximate the fulness of the stature of Christ.

And in that process Jesus was very patient with them. He knew how much they had to overcome and live down. He knew how much of the old they had to get out of their minds, and how much of the new they had to get into them. It was one thing for them to say, "Lord, I believe," and quite another to bring their lives under absolute control of that faith. Faith, saving faith, may be an almost instantaneous act, while growth in grace and conformity to the will of God calls for the patient and persistent labor of a lifetime.

But Christ gave the disciples the standards of discipleship, and by the inspiration of His Holy Spirit these are recorded in the gospels and the epistles. Some of those standards loom large in the lessons we are now concluding.

One of them is the humble and unselfish spirit. Jesus did not seem to be able to make that impression very deep in the hearts of His disciples until He took a little child and set him in their midst and said, "Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven." And that lesson had to be taught them over and over again. They were covetous of positions and quarreled among themselves as to who should be greatest. It was given them to understand that that spirit might be expected among the Gentiles, but it was not so in the kingdom He came to establish; for in that kingdom he who made himself the servant of all was the greatest.

A second quality of discipleship calls for the use of our substance in behalf of the increase of the kingdom of God. The case of the rich young ruler serves to illustrate this principle. How do we make our money, and how do we spend our money, are important questions. Our answer to them reveals character with a nicety that can hardly be surpassed. We may well ask ourselves if we can be Christians if we are not willing to contribute a portion of our income to bring the Gospel within reach of everybody. "Giving up All for the Kingdom" may be too advanced for most of us; have we arrived at the place where we are disposed to give anything for it? The stewardship of possessions is a Christian problem, and it is one that each of us must solve.

Christian discipleship calls for watchfulness. No one knows when Christ will return. Under the figure of a wedding we are enjoined to be ready for His appearance. That only means we are to live daily as best we can by the grace of God. It is a solemn protest against that view of life which says we are to feed ourselves with all the pleasure and comfort and ease we can lay hold on until failing strength threatens us and then stretch out our trembling fingers toward the cross. There

is not much watchfulness about that; that is, not much watchfulness except that of the temperature and the pulse. Be ye ready.

Christian discipleship also calls for faithfulness. We are endowed with certain rights, gifts, talents; and we are to employ them in such a manner as to increase the measure of righteousness in the world, thereby hastening the coming of the kingdom for which Christ came, and worked, and prayed, and taught, and suffered, and died, and rose again.

It will not be well with the servant who looks at his talent and decides he does not want to be responsible for it and then proceeds to put it where it can be a blessing to no one. People are willing to pay good interest these days on money for purposes of speculation. They do not seem to be unwilling to take a venture in the business world. Nothing ventured nothing won seems to be their motto.

Christian discipleship carries with it the conviction that the cross of Christ stands at the center of everything moral and religious. Jesus did not hesitate to project His cross into the thinking of His disciples. They were not pleased about it. They frankly said it was a mistake. They did not see why it was not possible to build a kingdom without the shadow of a cross over it. But that was not our Lord's opinion. There is no reason to believe that He would have taken up His cross and carried it to Calvary and died on it if it had been an optional matter.

The radio brings us numerous messages from which the story of the cross as a redemptive agency is omitted. We judge from not a few of them that the speakers believe all that is necessary for us is to pull ourselves together and push right ahead into the kingdom without any assistance. We are quite competent to prepare our own certificate of character for the divine approval. The word discipleship connotes something else. We are learners, suppliants; we are dependent on spiritual forces outside ourselves.

If Christian discipleship means anything it is that we are pronounced in the feeling that we are under obligation to give the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the whole world. When shall we learn this fundamental purpose of the Saviour's love? When will the Christian Church bring together her treasures and powers and put forth an effort consistent with her resources for the evangelization of the whole world? We are almost at the point of jeopardizing our opportunities in some of the fields because we have lacked that earnest resolve which alone can bring assurance of the blessing of God.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

What is the theme of the lessons for the next quarter? Before you take up the helps on the first lesson what impression have you of Abraham? What was there in him that makes him stand out as one of the foremost characters of the Old Testament?

Is the title "A Pioneer of Faith" suitable to him? What led him to leave his homeland? What was held before him as a reward for obeying the call to go out in search of a new country? How do the Jews all over the world regard Abraham? How is he regarded by the Mohammedans? How by the Christians?



RUTH AND NAOMI

THIRD QUARTER

Representative Men and Women of the Old Testament

Third
Quarter

ABRAHAM: A PIONEER OF FAITH

Lesson I
July 6

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LESSON TEXT: Genesis 12:1-5; 13:1-12; 17:1-8; 18:22-23; Hebrews 11:8-10.
(Print Genesis 12:1-3; 13:7-12; Hebrews 11:8-10.)

(American Standard Revision Text)

Genesis 12:1. Now Jehovah said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto the land that I will show thee:

2. and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and be thou a blessing:

3. and I will bless them that bless thee, and him that curseth thee will I curse: and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

13:7. And there was a strife between the herdsmen of Abram's cattle and the herdsmen of Lot's cattle: and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelt then in the land.

8. And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdsmen and thy herdsmen; for we are brethren.

9. Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if *thou wilt take* the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if *thou take* the right hand, then I will go to the left.

10. And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the Plain of the Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before Jehovah destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, like the garden of Jehovah, like the land of Egypt, as thou goest unto Zoar.

11. So Lot chose him all the Plain of the Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other.

12. Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the Plain, and moved his tent as far as Sodom.

Hebrews 11:8. By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed to go out unto a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.

9. By faith he became a sojourner in the land of promise, as in a *land* not his own, dwelling in tents, with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise:

10. for he looked for the city which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

GOLDEN TEXT: By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed to go out unto a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.—Hebrews 11:8.

LESSON GOAL.—To show that a venturing, confiding faith has God's help and blessing.

LESSON PLAN

- I. THE CHALLENGING CALL. (Genesis 12:1-5.)
- II. THE CONFLICT FOR PLACE. (13:1-12.)
- III. THE COVENANT-PROMISES. (17:1-8.)
- IV. THE CONFIDING COMPANIONSHIP. (18:22-23.)
- V. THE COMMENDATION OF FAITH. (Hebrews 11:8-10.)

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

12:1. *Now Jehovah said unto Abram.*—How this word came, we do not know. Some incident may have been considered an urge of Providence. There may have been a direct suggestion of God's Spirit to his inmost soul. The Oriental does not interpret this as speaking to the external ear of a man. A common saying of the Arab today, when he feels a deep impression in his soul, is "God has spoken to me." We speak of a call from God, or a warning from God, and do not mean that we have heard an audible voice.

13: 7. *A strife between the herdsmen.*—Water and pasture were essential for the herds of Abraham and Lot. The strife was probably over water sources. This was then and is now a frequent cause of trouble. The fact that the land was already occupied by two tribes made the available water and pasture all the more coveted.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

More than forty centuries ago began the migration of Terah, Abraham's father, from "Ur of the Chaldees," a city of ancient Babylonia. Their course was north along the Euphrates. At Haran in Mesopotamia they remained until Terah died. Abraham, accompanied by Lot and others, continued under divine guidance toward Canaan, going by way of Damascus and reaching Nablus, between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim, where they tented for a time. Continuing south they stayed for a time near Bethel. Famine drove them into Egypt. They returned to Bethel, but in the meantime prosperity had increased their possessions so that separation of their flocks and herds was necessary. With magnanimity Abraham allowed Lot to have the rich lands of the Jordan valley, while he went farther south into the region of Hebron, where for the most part the remainder of Abraham's life was spent. Near Hebron is the "cave of Machpelah," which Abraham purchased for "four hundred shekels of silver, current money with the merchant," as a grave for Sarah. There, too, Abraham was buried by his sons Isaac and Ishmael. He was one hundred and seventy-five years old when he died.

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

The introductory chapters of Genesis deal with universal history and locate the place of Israel among the other nations. In tracing the development of the kingdom of God in the line of Israelitish history, the record of Abraham forms the connecting link between universal and Israelitish history. Abraham gave the world its first clear conception of the true God. He was a monotheist and learned the way of acceptable worship and service to God.

THE CHALLENGING CALL (12:1-5)

The specific call to Abraham followed the more general call which had come to Abraham's father. In the meantime they had journeyed from Ur to Haran, where Terah and Haran, Lot's father, died. Abraham thus came into headship over the family. God's call to Abraham was a challenge to faith. It asked for extreme sacrifice, a complete separation from all his kinfolk and an undefined journey to an unnamed country. Accepting the call as genuine direction from God, Abraham was willing to obey. With the call came the assurance of blessing, a blessing God would give. He was to become the progenitor of a great

nation, and from him was to come a blessing for all the people of the earth. A protection was thrown about him in that whoever was against him would be made to suffer. All these statements were extravagant; it seemed that they could not be true. How could one unknown man go as a foreigner into an unknown country and hope for so flattering an outcome? But Abraham did not see the difficulties; he saw only the promise and felt only the safety of trusting to God's guidance. He was venturing into the uncertain future with God. The swift obedience proved the strength of his faith. He gathered his people about him, relatives and servants, and started on the way to Canaan, taking with him all his possessions. No description is given of the three hundred mile trip. That was unimportant; the fact of note was that they came to Canaan. Canaan was the old name for Palestine.

THE CONFLICT FOR PLACE (13:1-5)

Abraham journeyed southward through Palestine. He stopped at Shechem; there he received God's promise that his descendants would possess that land. At Bethel, five miles farther south, Abraham set up an altar and worshiped Jehovah. He went into the South, the broad plain connecting the mountainous regions of Palestine with the desert. A famine drove them into Egypt. On the return from Egypt, they passed through the South and stopped at Bethel. Abraham was rich; his possessions were cattle, silver and gold.

The intention seems to have been to remain at Bethel and pasture the herds on the surrounding hills and in the neighboring valleys. But the conflict for the use of pasture and the right to wells grew to bitter extremes. This was begun by the herdsmen, but Abraham and Lot were involved. Settlement was necessary. They could not risk strife when surrounded by foreign tribes. Lot also was rich. He had his possessions through inheritance and through the generous attitude of Abraham. The plan for adjustment came from Abraham. He allowed Lot to choose which part of the territory he would occupy and Abraham would keep his herds separated from Lot's. Lot manifested selfishness in selecting the fine, well-watered plains along the Jordan and across the Dead Sea. This left for Abraham the hills, where it was difficult to maintain his herds. So they separated, Lot taking the best.

In this conflict for place Abraham showed his fine spirit and exercised a magnanimity that was remarkable. He was under Jehovah's influence and by this act of generosity indicated his unfailing faith that Jehovah would care for him and make good His promise to him, even among the unpromising hills of Canaan.

THE COVENANT-PROMISES (17:1-8)

Many tests came to Abraham's faith. His hope was for an heir through whom Jehovah's promise that he would be a great national father could be fulfilled. But time passed and the heir was not yet born. Ishmael was accepted by Abraham as the probable channel

through whom the promise would come true. But he was the son of a handmaid. Jehovah renewed the promise and joined it with a covenant, which was to be symbolized by circumcision.

The three phases of the promise were restated: there was to be a numerous and wide-branching posterity, all Canaan was to become the possession of his descendants and he was to be a blessing. The latter part of the promise was given a new angle whereby there was to be established a reconciliation between Abraham and Jehovah. (This was a broad plan inclusive of all the later generations.)

Ishmael was thirteen; Abraham was ninety-nine. Abraham expected no further unfoldment of Jehovah's promise. But he received added communication. He was told always to be conscious of Jehovah's presence and to live a pious, whole-hearted, upright life. His name was changed from "Abram" to "Abraham." The new name probably embodied the promises, for it has been explained as meaning, "the father of a multitude." The promise of Jehovah was supported by a covenant in which Jehovah pledged Himself to perform all that the promise involved. The covenant was to be everlasting; it held out to all believers, such as Abraham, the unfailing power of Jehovah to fulfill His promises.

THE CONFIDING COMPANIONSHIP (18: 22-23)

The visit of the angels to Abraham gave him a chance to show his Oriental hospitality. He received the promise that Sarah would become the mother of the heir through whom the promise was to be fulfilled. Jehovah planned to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, but because of Lot's living at Sodom, Abraham was told of the plan. Abraham was grieved, but his gracious forgiveness of Lot's unfair advantage of him and his keen concern for his safety led him to make the intercessory prayer. Abraham's faith was tried but it went through unshaken. He pled for the saving of the city for the sake of a few righteous.

This companionship with Jehovah, this close conference with Him, could not have been except for Abraham's sturdy, persistent faith in Jehovah. This event is a revealing part of the evolution of Abraham's completer faith in Jehovah. He learned companionship with Jehovah and out of this came confidence, even a friendliness, so that he was called "the friend of God."

THE COMMENDATION OF FAITH (Hebrews 11:8-10)

Abraham deserved inclusion among the heroes of faith. His faith started with Jehovah's promise. He acted on that faith and went into the promised land. He had a faith that received mention in the Old Testament, the first so honored. He spent his life in nomadic fashion in Canaan, never seeing the fulfillment of the promises, but always keeping true to the covenant involved in the promise. Though a dweller in tents he looked ahead to a permanent, heavenly city. So loyally did he stand by his faith that he deserves every commendation for his faith.

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

FROM THE KNOWN TO THE UNKNOWN

All progress results from this procedure. Every advancement rests on what immediately precedes. The top step of a stairs is only one above the other steps. A grade in school is just one grade ahead of former grades. So with everything we do we pass from what we have to what we have not until we possess it. We are always going from the known to the unknown. This is the story of explorers. The discoverer of America reached the goal by pushing the bow of his ship out into the unknown. The investigator of a crime takes what is evident and reaches on into what is still speculative as he seeks facts.

Our faith is no different. It always has a basis of fact, a something known and experienced to rest upon. Then faith reaches out its hand, listens attentively, steps forward confidently, ventures fearlessly, ever advancing from the known to the unknown. Abraham looms high on the heroic scroll because he took God at His word and went on.

CEASELESS ENCOURAGEMENT

But faith is not always a blind, trusting venture when God asks us to leave all to Him and keeping going. God would not treat us that way; it would be unsafe, for faith needs occasional resting places where amid the possessions faith has led to there may be a checking up to prove that faith is dependable. God did that with Abraham. The record is that "into the land of Canaan they came." The objective had been reached. God had truly showed him a land which was to be his and his children's. Canaan reached was a new basis for additional faith.

We must have these occasional encouragements to keep us going. The farmer must have crops at least now and then or he would stop farming. The merchant must have profits or he would give up business. The pupil must pass some tests or he would lose heart and quit. The Christian must find frequent rewards of faith or he would become discouraged and reject Christ and despise religion.

GENEROSITY A TRAIT OF FAITH

Faith lifted Abraham above the ordinary bargain-driving attitude of the tribal leaders. Faith helped him depend on God rather than sharp dealing to maintain himself. The fine generosity he showed toward Lot is recorded as out of the common experiences of his day.

Giving is ranked as evidence of generosity. It is not always so. It may be out of necessity or to keep face in the community. But generous giving is voluntary, not of compulsion. Man deserves not the name for being generous unless his giving, or sharing, is of his own free willingness. The Church thrives on such giving and withers under compelled giving. It seems that the "cheerful giver" is the man who trusts in God, though he gives more than judgment endorses.

HOW FAITH FACES PROBLEMS

The problem of place confronted Abraham. His seniority gave him right to the best. He could have commanded the separation and sent

Lot and his possessions where he chose. He had that authority. But under God's guidance two qualities swayed Abraham's handling of the problem: the desire for peace and the spirit of unselfishness. Had he not been following the lead of faith in God neither of these qualities would have ruled his actions.

Christ exemplified peace and unselfishness. He taught His followers to be like Him. If we would check up on our faith in Christ today we need do more than reckon the doctrines about Him we accept and parade our strict orthodoxy according to the credal declarations of the Church. There must be a rating of our relation to others in the routine matters of every-day living. If we look in vain for signs of peace with others and of unselfishness toward them, we dare not grade our faith too high. Fruitless faith is moribund.

FAITH AND THE FUTURE

Faith always has a future look; it is anticipatory. Even the assurance it gives for the present moment has a forward slant, for the present and the future are but indeterminably separated. Faith deals effectively on our near and our far future. To concentrate on any fixed point of the future as the sole goal for living is a disastrous habit and some Christians have the habit. Their faith for the future has only a heavenly purpose; they have faith for the eternal happiness, an entirely selfish matter. But the faith that means something vital reaches out to this afternoon and tomorrow and next week, although confidently taking occasional glances at heaven. This means that faith links us with each advancing step we take, being careful of each inch we travel, though the goal is a thousand miles distant. The student must get today's lesson well if he would graduate with honor. The farmer must cultivate thoroughly now if he would harvest amply. The Christian must have faith moment by moment if he would reach heaven at last.

VISIBLE MARKS OF FAITH

Washington praying at Valley Forge, Foch praying in Paris, the people saw that they had faith. Livingstone goes to Africa, Moody establishes Northfield—and they are praised for their faith. Thus we scan past records and collect marks of faith. We look about us and see who have faith—we judge by what they are and do. All this is profitable observation but there is more than this needed. Each wants to see signs of faith in himself. After all in the matter of faith in God our chief concern is not what people say about us but what we know. The "inner light" of the Quaker means more to him than the comments of Friends. Abraham surely was conscious of marks of his faith, which were undiscerned by others. We want marks of faith visible to ourselves, though invisible to others, marks seen only by us and God.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

Read the Bible references. List the evidences of the selfishness of Jacob. Outline the journeys Jacob made. What special things did God do with Jacob and for him that turned him into a noble man?

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LESSON TEXT: Genesis 25:19-34; 27:1—33:20; 46:28—47:12.
(Print Genesis 25:29-34; 28:18-22; 29:18-20; 33:1-4, 18.)

(American Standard Revision Text)

25:29. And Jacob boiled pottage: and Esau came in from the field, and he was faint:

30. and Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red *pottage*; for I am faint: therefore was his name called Edom.

31. And Jacob said, Sell me first thy birthright.

32. And Esau said, Behold, I am about to die: and what profit shall the birthright do to me?

33. And Jacob said, Swear to me first; and he sware unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob.

34. And Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentils; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: so Esau despised his birthright.

28:18. And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put under his head, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it.

19. And he called the name of that place Beth-el: but the name of the city was Luz at the first.

20. And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on,

21. so that I come again to my father's house in peace, and Jehovah will be my God,

22. then this stone, which I have set

up for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee.

29:18. And Jacob loved Rachel; and he said, I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy younger daughter.

19. And Laban said, It is better that I give her to thee, than that I should give her to another man: abide with me.

20. And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.

33:1. And Jacob lifted up his eyes, and looked, and, behold, Esau was coming, and with him four hundred men. And he divided the children unto Leah, and unto Rachel, and unto the two handmaids.

2. And he put the handmaids and their children foremost, and Leah and her children after, and Rachel and Joseph hindmost.

3. And he himself passed over before them, and bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.

4. And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him: and they wept.

18. And Jacob came in peace to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Padan-aram; and encamped before the city.

GOLDEN TEXT: For what shall a man be profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and forfeit his life? or what shall a man give in exchange for his life?—Matthew 16:26.

LESSON GOAL.—To teach that a dishonest, selfish man may, through humble obedience to God, become an honored, useful man.

LESSON PLAN

- I. JACOB'S DECEPTION OF ESAU. (Genesis 25:29-34.)
- II. JACOB'S VISION AND VOW. (28:18-22.)
- III. JACOB'S SERVICE TO LABAN. (29:18-20.)
- IV. JACOB'S RECONCILIATION WITH ESAU. (33:1-4, 18.)
- V. JACOB'S CLOSING DAYS. (46:28—47:12.)

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

Genesis 25:31. *Sell me first thy birthright.* To the oldest son went the headship of the family, with the rank and standing of the

father. A double portion of the father's property went to him. It gave him the priestly rights for the family and for the descendants of Abraham the choicest covenant privileges. The birthright might be sold, or forfeited by bad conduct.

28:18. *Set it up for a pillar and poured oil upon the top of it.*—"The belief that a stone or pillar was the abode of deity was common among primitive peoples. The stone which Jacob set up was the symbol of the presence of the divine Spirit, which he probably believed to be in some way connected with it, seeing that he called the stone, 'God's house'."—*Davis*.

Oil, as the symbol of consecration, was poured on the stone to set it apart as a memorial of his great experience in discovering God's presence there.

29:18. *I will serve thee seven years.* — Custom was to give rich gifts to a father for his daughter. Jacob could not do this. He offered his services instead. It is reported that this plan is still followed in places in the East, including parts of Palestine. Young men not able to pay money bind themselves to work for the father of the woman he seeks for his wife. It is assumed that the father should be compensated for the loss of his daughter's domestic work.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

Isaac was living with his family at Beer-sheba, twenty-seven miles south of Hebron. It was on the great highway from the north, through Palestine to Egypt. It was a place of many wells, and consequently a coveted place by all the tribes. It was from here that Jacob made his long journey to Haran, at the suggestion of his mother. He passed through Hebron and Jerusalem and Bethel and far north by way of Damascus, crossing the Euphrates and reaching a favored spot in Mesopotamia, where lived his uncle Laban.

His stop for the night at Bethel gave him the dream in which he saw the ladder reaching from earth to heaven. When one sees the natural stairway of limestone rocks stretching up the hillside from Bethel, it is easy to understand the background of Jacob's dream. Jacob's stay in the service of Laban was a time of matching his own deceitfulness with that of his uncle. Twenty years were spent in Haran. Jacob's return to Bethel was a contrast with his going to Haran. He went out poor; he came back rich. He started out a conscience-pricked man; he came back a God-fearing man. Be it said to Jacob's credit that he profited by his hard experiences and became an obedient servant of God.

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

It would be hard to find a man of greater selfishness and more unpromising future, so far as having a good standing with Jehovah, than Jacob during his early years. His name stands today as an outstanding example of what God is able to do for a man who allows himself to be guided by God. Jacob's record is replete with condemning practices, but he was transformed by the power of God and, being forgiven by God, he arose to distinction as the father of the Israelites. It is his name and not Abraham's that they carry. However, Abraham was greater than Jacob and to be a child of Abraham by faith is greater than to be a descendant of Israel.

JACOB'S DECEPTION OF ESAU (25:29-34)

Esau and Jacob were twin sons of Isaac and Rebekah. They were different in disposition and habits. Esau was an out-of-doors man; Jacob was a tent-loving man. Isaac, a mild, undemonstrative man, loved his rugged son Esau, but Rebekah preferred the home-staying Jacob. Rebekah was jealous of the rights and privileges which she wanted for Jacob. She was not much concerned about what was just and ethical so long as she got what she wanted. Jacob was like her in that deception was not refused when he saw how to get what he chose.

Esau, tired and hungry, after a long hunt, became a victim of Jacob's deceit. Jacob had learned cooking and Esau loved good food. Esau asked for food and Jacob bargained with him. He would provide the food for pay and the pay he asked was the birthright. This belonged to Esau but was not appreciated by him. He did not care much to take his father's place; his preference was the freedom of the hills and plains. He would rather have a good meal, just then when he was weary in body, than to carry the distinction of heading his father's house.

Jacob saw his chance to get the upper hand over his older brother and sweep the property and the chief position in the family into his possession. He would become the lord over the household by deception.

JACOB'S VISION AND VOW (28:18-22)

Jacob continued to practice fraud, but his mother stood by him, his partner in evil. Esau became justly incensed and felt justified in threatening the life of Jacob. Rebekah planned Jacob's escape and at the same time plotted to get Isaac's endorsement of her plan. It was decided between them, at Rebekah's suggestion, that Jacob should return to Haran and find a wife among her relatives. Jacob was doubly willing to make the journey; he wanted to escape Esau's righteous wrath and he wanted a wife.

Jacob had a religious training, at least he had some definite ideas about Jehovah. He believed in the possibility of receiving messages from Jehovah. He needed to learn that no matter where he went Jehovah would be there. Jehovah was not to be thought of as a God limited to one place, confined to the area occupied by Isaac. At Bethel Jacob spent the night. His mind was full of serious thinking. He was a conscience-convicted man. Maybe he was afraid. The last thing he saw before dark was the fading light of the sun going up the stair-like side of the rock-covered hillside. So he dreamed. His dream was used by Jehovah to make Jacob think of God. He learned that God was there and that communication with God was possible. He faced the morning with a conviction that even at Bethel Jehovah was with him. He could not get away from Jehovah. He was afraid. He felt the urge to propitiate God. He set up a stone pillar, poured oil on it and made a vow before God. His vow was a conditional one. He would regard Bethel as God's house if God would care for him and provide

for him. This vision and vow must go together; they are the first steps of Jacob's upward way into favor with Jehovah.

JACOB'S SERVICE TO LABAN (29:18-20)

Jacob's twenty years in Haran were useful in showing him the folly of trying to get along fraudulently, although in matching tricks with Laban he showed himself a past-master. Jehovah's promise was fulfilled for him. He did prosper and he was cared for. These were years of "discipline to which he was subjected in order that the darker features in his character might be purified, and that he might learn to put his reliance, not in unworthy scheming, but in simple faith in the love and blessing of the God of Abraham and Isaac."

JACOB'S RECONCILIATION WITH ESAU (33: 1-4, 18)

Jacob came to the conviction that his prosperity was due to God's blessings. He felt no obligation to serve Laban longer and he had no scruples in taking with him all the property he had managed by fair and foul means to acquire. He left Laban secretly, was pursued and there was a final agreement that they would not interfere with each other. Jacob's procedure was uncertain for he did not know what Esau might do to him. In his fear he asked Jehovah for protection. The wrestling of Jacob with the angel ended in his being given a new name, Israel, and in his discovery of the power of God.

"With the change of Jacob's name to Israel, the tone of the narrative changes. Esau is no longer the rude, natural man, the easy victim of his brother's cunning, but a noble and princely character, whose bearing is evidently meant to inspire admiration. Jacob, too, is presented in a more favorable light: if he is still shrewd and calculating, and not perfectly truthful, he does not sink into the knavery of his earlier dealings with Esau and Laban, but exhibits the typical virtues of the patriarchal ideal."—*Hastings*.

The meeting of Jacob and Esau revealed the fine generosity of Esau. He was willing to forgive and to use his strength to defend and assist Jacob. Jacob maintained his caution, showing an attitude that was "extremely politic but not very heroic."

Jacob pushed on and settled in Shechem. He chose a fine land, with springs and verdant pastures. He dug his famous well and set up an altar, his first in Canaan. Here he spoke of God as the God of Israel. He tarried for a time in Shechem, buying land there, even though he had vowed to Jehovah to return to Bethel.

JACOB'S CLOSING DAYS (46: 28—47: 12)

Jacob died in Egypt, conscious of the fulfilment of Jehovah's promise to him at Bethel. He had become a great people and was honored by his own family. He had changed his manner of life. He was truly a transformed man. Deception had been suppressed. He put his trust in Jehovah and imparted blessings to his children in the name of Jehovah. And then he yielded his spirit to God.

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

A MAN OF EXTREMES

This is just what Jacob was. He was a practiced trickster, skilful and successful. He became an ardent servant of Jehovah, concerned in the religious life of his children. His battle was long and severe. For a long time he was a Jekyll and Hyde type of man, sometimes good, sometimes bad. He was covetous; he was consecrated. He was false; he was fair. He was dreadful; he was delightful. He was a victim of selfishness; he was victor over self. He was God-defying; he was God-obeying. He started wrong; he ended right. He was the fine product of God's transforming power.

But the fact that Jacob came from extreme repulsiveness to extreme attractiveness in his moral and religious life is no excuse for men to be bad for a while with the intention of being good later. Today men have better light to follow than Jacob had. He was the product of his day, a day of few right leadings. We should be an improvement over him.

DISCOVERING GOD

This is the universal search. Humanity wants God; it searches for Him. But He is not found by mental processes; He is not scientifically segregated and labeled. Jacob discovered God when God revealed His presence to him. The consciousness of God's presence started Jacob on the upward way.

The man-directed search for God today would be ridiculous if it were not so serious. Where to find Him, how to know Him, what He is like, what to do with Him, and a lot more mentally fascinating themes are being puzzled over today. People are writing about them and talking about them and disputing over them. But can man by searching find out God? Be still and know that I am God. The God man thinks out for himself cannot be worshiped in the beauty of holiness. Men never erect Bethels except for the God of revelation.

DETERMINING TO SERVE GOD

Face to face with God, Jacob changed his outlook on life. He realized that God was wherever he might be; he could not get out of the reach of God. His consciousness of the power of God and his conviction that to serve God was the surest course to safety and success, led to a vow that he would serve none but God. This determination had vital influence on the transforming of his life. Even if there was a good deal of a bargaining suggestion in his avowed purpose to serve God, he must not be criticized; that was a long way for a man of Jacob's traits and training to go.

Passing centuries have not altered this human response to an acknowledgment of God. To know Him calls for serving Him. The record of the Church is replete with such characters. Ministers, missionaries, teachers, workers for God of all types are examples of this process; they found God; then they willed to serve Him.

THE LONG, HARD DISCIPLINE

Men do not rise by sudden springs into acceptance with God, so far as their routine of work is concerned. God did not plan man's exaltation to an ideal state on an airplane principle. Rather it is the trudging climb of a rugged mountain. What God expects us to become is not attained by quick flight. The Bible record of individuals who attained removes all such notions of immediacy in reaching thorough qualification for divine approval and for symmetrical usefulness. Jacob plodded through a hard and taxing jungle of discipline before emerging into the man God could use and a race could admire.

Discipline is distasteful at best, but it must be rigidly adhered to if the results are to be satisfying. Education proceeds on this policy. Mechanics are produced by this plan. Statesmen follow this path. Christians have no other course. The severity of the discipline is determined by our resistance. Jacob's natural bent was to resist; hence his long, hard discipline. His innate and practiced selfishness subjected him to years of exacting discipline before he was a transformed man.

ACKNOWLEDGING DEPENDENCE ON GOD

Although Jacob used all his skill to increase wealth and to attain fine standing, he learned to say that all his successes were due to God's help. When he met dangers he sought God's help; he feared to trust his own strength. He never relinquished his employment of all the wisdom and abilities he had, but to these he added trust in God. He was a great man measured by earthly standards, but he was a greater man because he leaned hard on God.

"Don't thank me; thank God" is the humble reply of the true hero of faith when receiving the adulations of a grateful people who have profited by his ministry. Sincere believers still say, "Not unto us, O Jehovah, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory."

DELAYED BUT CERTAIN HONORS

A few get deserved honors for sudden exceptional achievements, but honors approach with snail pace for the majority. In the long list of the famous, comparatively few had laurels to flaunt while they were still at their best. Joan of Arc was long dead before exalted to sainthood. Ruth never knew that her name would be honored in the ancestral line of the Messiah. Luther died unconscious of any greatness to be coupled with his name. Jacob's honors came late. His name was not widely sung in praise until long after his bones reposed in Hebron. Our wisest course is to do our best, live our noblest, stand our firmest, be our truest and plan but little for honors.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

Read the references that tell about Moses. Note the lesson goal and the lesson plan. Why was Moses needed? How was he prepared for his work? How did his relation to God affect his relation to his work? What marks of courage did he manifest before Pharaoh? How did his faith in God help him?

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LESSON TEXT: Exodus 1:8-14; 2:1-22; 3:1-14; 11:1-10; 32:30-35;
Deuteronomy 34:1-8; Hebrews 11:23-29. (Print Exodus 3:1-12.)

(American Standard Revision Text)

1. Now Moses was keeping the flock of Jethro his father-in-law the priest of Midian: and he led the flock to the back of the wilderness, and came to the mountain of God, unto Horeb.

2. And the angel of Jehovah appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.

3. And Moses said, I will turn aside now, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.

4. And when Jehovah saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I.

5. And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.

6. Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God.

7. And Jehovah said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people that are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by

reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows;

8. and I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanite, and the Hittite, and the Amorite, and the Perizzite, and the Hivite, and the Jebusite.

9. And now, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me: moreover I have seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them.

10. Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt.

11. And Moses said unto God, Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?

12. And he said, Certainly I will be with thee; and this shall be the token unto thee, that I have sent thee: when thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain.

GOLDEN TEXT.—By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.—Hebrews 11:27.

LESSON GOAL.—To show how trust in God and obedience to Him make a courageous leader for a God-approved cause.

LESSON PLAN

- I. THE BACKGROUND FOR LEADERSHIP. (Exodus 1:8-14; 2:1-22.)
- II. THE COMMISSION TO LEADERSHIP. (3:1-14.)
- III. THE CONDUCT OF THE LEADER. (11:1-10; 32:30-35.)
- IV. THE SEQUENCE OF FAITH. (Hebrews 11:23-29.)

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

Verse 2. *A flame of fire out of the midst of a bush.*—The bush was probably “the shittim, or acacia tree, the thorn bush of the desert which spread out its tangled branches, thick set with white thorns, over the rocky ground.” It often grew from fifteen to twenty-five feet high, with trunks two feet thick. In such a bush Moses saw the fire, but the bush was not burned. Fire is used frequently in the Scriptures as an emblem of God, because of its illuminating, purifying and destructive powers; it represented the presence of God. “The bush burning, yet un-

consumed, has always been regarded as an emblem of Israel in Egypt."

Verse 5. *Put off thy shoes.*—This was an ancient way of showing reverence in the East; it is still practiced. Before entering a Mohammedan mosque the shoes must be removed. (To spare tourists this trouble, large slippers are provided that one can step into and go through the sacred places without defiling them).

Verse 8. *A land flowing with milk and honey.*—This proverbial expression indicated fertility and abundance. After wandering in the barren wilderness, Canaan would be indeed a bountiful land (Deut. 8: 7-9).

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

Moses was born in Egypt, at what site is not known. It was near the Nile. His life was spared from the decree of the Pharaoh who knew not Joseph. He became the "son of Pharaoh's daughter" and until he was forty years of age Moses enjoyed the privileges of a royal child. He was educated in a university and trained in the ways of the kingly court. He resented the affliction of his race by the Egyptian slave drivers. One of these he slew and to escape death fled from Egypt to Midian, probably going over the highway which runs from the Isthmus of Suez to the eastern arm of the Red Sea, where Midian was located. Forty years were spent in Midian. He had time for meditation and learned the value of self-control and became acquainted with God, so that God's message to him from the burning bush was for him a real call to service.

Moses was a traveler. He went from Egypt to Midian and the region of Sinai, from Midian back to Egypt as the deliverer, from Egypt, as the emancipator, back to Sinai and thence through the wilderness regions for forty years, finally reaching Mt. Pisgah, where he saw the promised land his feet were not to tread. At the age of one hundred and twenty he died in the land of Moab and was buried by God in a grave that no man has ever seen.

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

The deliverance of Israel from the long, severe bondage in Egypt was made by Jehovah through the leadership of Moses, whom God had specially raised up for the purpose. Israel came therefore to have a consciousness of freedom, a realization of Jehovah as their God and a willingness to be under the leadership of Moses. The later experiences of this people are proofs that back of Moses' daring work as their emancipator was the far-reaching purpose of God. Moses is rated as a man of exceeding meekness, yet he was as bold as a lion. He possessed the qualities of leadership in a supreme degree. His success as a leader was the result of his following divine guidance. There is no other way of accounting for the colossal achievement undeniably attributed to him.

THE BACKGROUND OF LEADERSHIP (1: 8-14; 2: 1-22)

The need was the first background. This need was the enslaved state of Israel. Many decades had passed since Joseph died. With his death came the bondage of his people, as they were exploited for the advantage of the Egyptian government. They were a profitable people to have as slaves. They were healthy, strong, willing to labor even under oppression. God prospered them and they increased numerically. Pharaoh was a military man with his eye on outside nations. He anticipated trouble if Israel allied with any invading army. He determined

to break their spirit and decrease their power. His plan was cruel to the extreme but it failed. God granted Israel favors and there was greater strength given to them. But they suffered under the taskmasters. They were driven and beaten. Their lot was intolerable. Their cry went up to Jehovah and He heard it and decided to lead them back to the land long before promised to Abraham and Jacob. This decision was the background for the need of a leader.

The birth and training of the man destined for leadership was another part of the background, a most essential part. There is tragic fascination in the remarkable rescue of Moses from the decree of Pharaoh. It was more than coincidence that he came to be the son of Pharaoh's daughter, thus having access to the best education available, and being in touch with the affairs of the nation. His experience with Egypt's royalty was part of his preparation for later leadership. His racial loyalty led to his killing a taskmaster. He fled for his life. He landed at Midian and for forty years was in seclusion. It was a time for deep thought, a time for gaining control over himself and for closer acquaintance with Jehovah. He learned the peculiarities of the land of Midian, and this, too, was an element in his training. So, as it turned out, these forty years in Midian must be built into the background of his leadership.

THE COMMISSION TO LEADERSHIP (3:1-14)

None but Jehovah knew what was ahead of Moses. Moses had no dream of returning to Egypt; it had no lure for him. He had taken up the occupation of his ancestors; he was a shepherd. It was while going about his work that he reached the region of Horeb, destined to play a part in his future. He saw the unconsumed burning bush. It was a novelty to him after these years of acquaintance with nature's desert phenomena. He investigated the odd sight. That investigation was most fortunate for him and for Israel. He was halted by the voice of Jehovah calling his name twice. Startled no doubt he was, but his answer put him in a position to receive further instruction. This came at once. He was to remove his shoes and approach no nearer, for he was on holy ground.

A new experience came to Moses. The voice announced who was speaking. Moses was listening to the God of his father and the God of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Moses was overawed; he covered his face; he was humble but expectant. Then came the announcement that God was mindful of the people back in Egypt, people of Moses' race, and that He called them His people. He reviewed their affliction and re-announced His promise to establish them in Canaan, although it was then inhabited by other peoples.

Jehovah works through human agents. Just then Moses was to be His agent to go to Egypt and face Pharaoh and bring Israel away from their bondage. It was a mighty task and the commission for doing it was laid by Jehovah on Moses. But Moses had lost his self-confidence.

He had not the daring he once had. He hesitated—a good sign that God could use him. Once he had walked in the royal Egyptian court, with the freedom of a prince of the land. But he felt he was nobody. He offered four excuses; personal unfitness, his people in Egypt would not know by what authority he came, they would not believe Jehovah sent him, and that he had not eloquence to persuade Pharaoh.

Jehovah quieted his fears and answered his excuses. He was assured that he would be successful and that he would later on assemble Israel at that very mountain. Moses was not stubborn; he did not refuse. He was ready to obey God and depend on God.

THE CONDUCT OF THE LEADER (11:1-10; 32: 30-35)

The record of what Moses did as leader of Israel displays his courageous leadership. Before Pharaoh he stood challenging his right to keep Israel when God wanted them; before Israel he pled heroically for their faith in God and in himself as God's servant. He met difficulties and dangers unwaveringly. He predicted the plagues and they came. He never lost confidence in what God told him. He made final plans for departure and encountered what appeared to be insurmountable barriers to emancipating Israel. He went through the wilderness, the lone loyalist to Jehovah on many occasions. He had courage to face God and offer to die rather than have the people perish. He stood out for complete severance from idolatry. He claimed God would not fail the people, if they gave Him a chance. He gave the last forty years of his life to God's service as leader of Israel and made for himself an imperishable name. He became "a truly gigantic figure; next to our Lord perhaps the most important personality in the history of religion."

THE SEQUENCE OF FAITH (Hebrews 11: 23-29)

The outcome of faith as seen in the life of Moses challenges the world to faith. Among the triumphs of his faith stand the most enriching experiences of the world. He towers among the giants as their greatest. It was all because he believed in God and obeyed what God told him. The array of great deeds set forth in these verses is a list of the sequences of faith. Had his faith failed, Moses would not have been known, because he would not have been useful.

Augustine paid high tribute to Moses, acknowledging his wonderful works as a result of his dealing with Jehovah: "This Moses, humble in refusing so great a service; resigned in undertaking, faithful in discharging, unwearied in fulfilling it; vigilant in governing his people; resolute in correcting them, ardent in loving them, and patient in bearing with them; the intercessor for them with God whom they provoked—this Moses—such and so great a man—we love, we admire, and, so far as may be, imitate."

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

THE MAN NEEDED

God needed a man, a trained man, a man who could be used in a great cause. Israel in bondage was crying for relief. The finely adjusted

ear of God heard that cry and His responsive heart sympathized with their distresses. He planned their delivery from slavery and for this deliverance God needed a man. The man God needed was out in Midian under prolonged preparation for the task God wanted done. Unconscious of this preparation Moses was following the stolid routine of his occupation. When God approached Moses, his surprise was that God needed him.

There is need for men today. The right kind of men find themselves in demand in all phases of life. There is a call for leaders and a selective process goes on to get the best leader. The requirements for the needed man are reasonable but exacting. One thing should not be overlooked and that is that for the work of God none but the right men are needed.

GOD'S PART IN HUMAN LEADERSHIP

What could Moses do without God? He had a good preparation for his task. Fortunate circumstances had provided him an education and an acquaintance with Egypt's policies. He went to Israel when the times were propitious for their rallying to a call to leave Egypt. But what could Moses accomplish unaided by God? The story indicates that each step of his success was according to divine direction and with strength from God.

Today we are stressing leadership in the Church. Efforts are made to make training of leaders attractive and effective. No phase of church activity is more planned for than leadership training. There is danger that the great fact will be overlooked that God must have a large part in human leadership. No good thing can result from a trained person unless he gives God a chance to work through him.

THE MEEKNESS IN LEADERSHIP

The changed disposition of Moses gave him a name for meekness. This came about gradually; it was not his bent by nature. He was a fiery man when first in Egypt. All his experiences tended to augment his boastfulness. He learned the insignificance of Moses as a man. He found out how weak he really was. He faced the fact that no man can get along on his own strength. He acquired the elements of meekness. But it was with his meekness that he began to grow in usefulness. God could use Moses, a man of meekness. The quality of leadership that acknowledges dependence on God is the surest guarantee that the leading will be with equity and will end successfully. This is not according to most human judgments, but it is proved by what God has done. There is no disgrace for the leader who acknowledges a greater strength than his own. The minister, the teacher, the Christian leader who claims little for himself and much for God will guide his people further and better.

NOT BY MIGHT

It was the unseen hand that delivered Israel from Egypt. Moses was there in person; Israel was a great host of people. But it was not

their might that broke down Pharaoh's opposition and carried them beyond his control. It was the marvelous, irresistible Spirit of God, whose power directed the processes of Israel's emancipation. At no point in the procedure did Moses assume that it was by him the work was being done. He credited God always.

Christians are apt to forget that the progress of the kingdom of God is not wholly dependent on the might of human endeavor. We count people, money, property and equipment values and think that by these we advance on the world. We rate our materials very high and reduce our standards to those of the world's business and too frequently neglect acknowledgment that it is as we consecrate these to God that there can be a ceaseless advance of the Christian Church.

PAY AS YOU GO

This is what Moses did. He was a courageous leader but he paid for every forward step he took. He met a most exacting people, for Israel was always demanding something. Their demands took precedence over everything; what they wanted was always uppermost. Moses had to satisfy them. He was the mediator between them and God and that cost him much. The whole journey from Egypt to Sinai, from Sinai through the wanderings to Jordan, was a constant call on Moses to pay and pay and pay. But he met all payments because he had God's storehouse to draw from. He set the example all men who would rise to greatness must follow. They, too, must pay as they go. Often it seems an injustice but leaders must keep on pouring out their best to balance accounts with their position. There may be overtaxing of endurance, but no matter, they must keep on paying. Leaders ought to have a great sympathy shown them and more help given them; they are paying out so much.

THE CHANGED MAN

The last forty years of Moses' life were different from his former years. He had become a changed man. He yielded to God and circumstances and the transformation came. He had the same zeal to get things done. He had the same natural powers for leadership. He had as much courage as ever. But he had been changed. His faith in God opened the way for him to discover how to evaluate himself and where to invest himself. His environment proved to him that the troubles of his people were for him to share. The more he worked for his people the closer he came to his God.

A great task and a devotion to it are changing men today. Think of great statesmen, leading educators, Christian leaders. Are they not changed men? The place a man holds changes him in proportion to his realization of obligation.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

Who were the judges? What was their office? How did God use them? Why was Deborah needed? Why did she call Barak? How account for their success? What place do women hold in the defence of the Church today?

DEBORAH: A LEADER IN A NATIONAL EMERGENCY

Lesson IV
July 27

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LESSON TEXT: Judges 4:1-15. (Print verses 1-10.)
(American Standard Revision Text)

1. And the children of Israel again did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah, when Ehud was dead.

2. And Jehovah sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, that reigned in Hazor; the captain of whose host was Sisera, who dwelt in Harosheth of the Gentiles.

3. And the children of Israel cried unto Jehovah: for he had nine hundred chariots of iron; and twenty years he mightily oppressed the children of Israel.

4. Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, she judged Israel at that time.

5. And she dwelt under the palm-tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill-country of Ephraim: and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment.

6. And she sent and called Barak the son of Abinoam out of Kedesh-naphtali, and said unto him, Hath not

Jehovah, the God of Israel, commanded, *saying*, Go and draw unto mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun?

7. And I will draw unto thee, to the river Kishon, Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude, and I will deliver him into thy hand.

8. And Barak said unto her, If thou wilt go with me, then I will go; but if thou wilt not go with me, I will not go.

9. And she said, I will surely go with thee: notwithstanding, the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honor; for Jehovah will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. And Deborah arose, and went with Barak to Kedesh.

10. And Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali together to Kedesh; and there went up ten thousand men at his feet: and Deborah went up with him.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not.—Isaiah 35:4.

LESSON GOAL.—To show that God raises up leaders to meet the emergencies of His people.

LESSON PLAN

I. THE OPPRESSION BY THE CANAANITES. (1-3.)

II. DEBORAH INSTRUCTS BARAK. (4-10.)

1. The Prophetess.
2. The Call of Barak.
3. The Plan of Attack.

III. THE DEFEAT OF SISERA. (12-15.)

1. The Assembled Enemy.
2. The Battle and Victory.

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

Verse 3. *Chariots of iron*.—"Judging by the representations on Egyptian and Assyrian monuments, these were probably two-wheeled vehicles of wood, open behind, with fittings and ornaments of iron. Each carried a driver, a fighter and a shield-bearer. The possession of chariots by the Canaanites was long a hindrance to the full occupation of the land by the Hebrews. David captured many of them and Solomon adopted them for his own army."—*The New Century Bible*.

Verse 5. *The palm tree of Deborah*.—Trees held a prominent place in Palestine. Their shade was much needed and they became the

easily located place for a teacher, leader, or judge. Deborah's tent was marked by a palm tree. She began to prophesy, giving warnings against idolatry and showing how to regain freedom from oppressors. Her place of abode came to be regarded as a seat of justice, and the tree by her tent was known as the palm tree of Deborah.

Verse 15. *Discomfited Sisera*. The fact of the storm and rain that came at the right time to make chariots and horses more of a danger than a help had much to do with defeating Sisera and was interpreted as a visitation of Jehovah, and it doubtless was (5: 20-22).

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

The period of the Judges lasted several hundred years, from the death of Joshua to the reign of Saul. A partial record of the period is in the Bible. It tells of a series of invasions by surrounding nations and the raising up of a leader, called a judge, whose prowess was largely military. These judges were directed by Jehovah and drove back the different invaders and there followed each repulse of the enemy a period of peace. Israel drifted back into idolatry and they were punished by these invading tribes.

The third great invasion was from the north, led by Sisera, the military leader of the armies of Jabin, king of the Canaanites. It was their land that was occupied by the Hebrews. For twenty years he oppressed them severely. They cried to Jehovah for mercy and Deborah was raised up to lead them to victory over Sisera.

Mt. Tabor is a conical-shaped mountain rising out of the northern part of the plain of Esdraelon and commanding it as a great natural fortification. Its precipitous sides rise more than 1,800 feet to a tableland. It was here that Barak gathered his ten thousand fighting men from Naphtali and Zebulun and waited for the coming of Sisera's army into the great plain. Probably without the storm and rain which filled the plain with streams, and turned it into a field of mud the Hebrew fighting men would have been no match for the trained and armed forces of the Canaanites.

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

The judges were deliverers, at times advisers, of Israel during the troublesome period during which the twelve tribes were drawing together to form a more national standing in the promised land. Following Joshua's death there was a time of loyalty to Jehovah and His worship was maintained. But the gods of the nations were gradually accepted, at least in part, for the sake of the protection and the blessings that the nations attributed to their gods. Israel did not put Jehovah aside, but tried to add the other gods so as to increase their benefits. But these phases of idolatry were rebuked by Jehovah and the people were allowed to be punished by different ones of the surrounding nations. There would be an outcry to Jehovah and He would raise up a strong deliverer who was known as judge. Among these judges Deborah is listed. She was a woman of wisdom and was consulted for advice. She allied Barak with her plan to deliver Israel from the thralldom of the Canaanites.

THE OPPRESSION BY THE CANAANITES (1-3)

Under the leadership of Ehud Israel had been kept true to Jehovah. But following his death there was a slip back into false religious prac-

tices. The punishment was the rise of the Canaanites against them. Their king was Jabin and their military leader was Sisera. They oppressed Israel for twenty years. Against them Israel was helpless, for their nine hundred chariots of iron could not be overpowered by foot soldiers, such as Israel had. Living in the mountain regions they had no need for chariots. It is clear that Israel had not forgotten Jehovah entirely. There were at least some who called to Him for deliverance, probably recalling how He had delivered their ancestors from the army of Egypt, which was equipped with chariots. Jehovah heard the call and sent another deliverer, this time a woman.

DEBORAH INSTRUCTS BARAK (4-10)

The prophetess, Deborah, was a married woman. She became the judge, probably not in the same sense as the word is used of others, but more of a seer, and adviser, one who hears the perplexities of people and hands on a judgment as to the wisest course to pursue, one who listens to disputes and points out the righteous way of adjusting them. So she is termed a prophetess who judged. She felt deeply the distress of her people and their failure to maintain loyalty to God struck her as a disgrace. Something must be done to throw off the yoke of Jabin, and to renew the worship of the one God. She was a patriot, devoted to a nationalistic purpose. "The thought that the tribes belonged to one another, that they were Jehovah's tribes—perhaps also that they must become Jehovah's nation—lived in her." She resented the encroachment of the Canaanites and was the moving spirit in starting an insurrection.

The call of Barak came from Deborah. She felt he was the man to assemble the fighting men of the two tribes most closely joined by the Canaanites, Zebulun and Naphtali. These men would be best qualified to make the attack. They would have the least distance to travel to gather for the proposed campaign. The scene of the fighting was on the territory of Issachar, but perhaps they had not been strong enough to repel the Canaanites from the plain, which was the allotment of Issachar. The two tribes called in to help would be sympathetic to the undertaking, for the Canaanites were constantly threatening and despoiling the borders of their tribal possessions. The order given by Deborah was that ten thousand fighting men of these two tribes were to be assembled on Mt. Tabor, ready for the approach of Sisera with his army. Deborah spoke as though her words were Jehovah's and no doubt she was under His direction. The promise was that after Barak had gathered his men on Tabor, God would bring Sisera with his chariots and army to the river Kishon, and deliver them into Barak's hands. (The Kishon is the second river in Palestine. Its length is thirty-five miles. With its many small tributaries it drains the plain of Esdraelon. It reaches the Mediterranean at the foot of Mt. Carmel. It is an easily fordable stream in summer, but in winter and spring it becomes an impassable torrent and the

surrounding lands a marsh). Barak made the condition of accepting the task laid on him Deborah's accompanying him. To this she agreed and went with Barak to Kadesh, evidently to assist him in calling the fighting men together. Her presence would make them more ready to answer Barak's summons. *The plan of attack* was simple enough. They were to climb to the top of Tabor, led by Barak, with Deborah going along. There they were to wait for opportune time to rush down to put Sisera to flight.

THE DEFEAT OF SISERA (12-15)

Report reached Sisera that Barak had gathered an army on Tabor. There was nothing for him to do but to attack them. So *the enemy assembled* under Sisera's leadership. They brought their chariots and their great army down to the Kishon. Their movements would be plainly seen from the top of Mt. Tabor. Deborah was the commander back of Barak, giving him the orders for attack. At the right moment she gave the command, with the promise that Jehovah would give the enemy into his hand that day. Probably she saw the gathering storm, the promise of rain, and knew that the chariots would be helpless in the muddy plain.

The battle and the victory are briefly described. Jehovah was credited with fighting for Israel's cause. The storm, the rain, the river joined to make Sisera's attack end in defeat. They were driven back toward the river and this was fatal for their chariots and army. The sweeping statement is made that Sisera found he could flee faster on foot than by chariot and ran for his life and that all his host fell; not a man was left. The victory brought the oppression of Israel by the Canaanites to an end. Deborah had come to the help of her people in the emergency and led them to victory and freedom.

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

THE FOLLY OF IRRELIGION

To try to be unreligious is one thing; to be irreligious is another. Probably in reality no man can be unreligious for there has been created in him the elemental response to some religious impulses. It would be hard to find a pure type of utter unreligion.

But men may be irreligious toward the true God either by substituting some idol for Him or by attempting to deceive Him by hypocritical worship or service. The Israelites in the days immediately before Deborah were irreligious. They turned away from God for idols; they approached Him with false worship. But their irreligion proved their undoing. God's power was not lessened because they failed to be loyal to Him. God is not hampered in His power by man's disloyalty to Him, even though God's plans may be hindered by man's failure to be fit for God's use. God could sell them to the Canaanites who oppressed them. They discovered the folly of their irreligion. What they found every man and nation that has learned the true religion will discover if

they descend into irreligion. Their case is worse because they once had the conscious privileges of God and the religion that binds to Him.

THE POWER OF A CONVICTION

"I must" is the persistent cry of the individual who comes under a great conviction that he is called of God to undertake a task that nobody seems to be taking seriously. There is driving force in heart-reaching convictions. Such convictions must be based on facts and real needs or fanaticism will probably result. But the sane man who feels the urge to step into some breach and becomes the savior in a situation will not run riot; his judgment will keep him straight. Deborah's conviction was of this type. She was as far removed from fanaticism as are the poles from each other.

There are quite a few nimby-namby folk who have a jelly fish attitude toward the things of God and the program of world betterment. They have no conviction that they are God's chosen vessels to convey to the places of need the elements of strength and leadership that may rectify a wrong condition. There are individuals in the Church today, well known to all of us, who are of a different character. They have conviction. They see clearly, think soundly, conclude wisely and put themselves into the work with determination. Their purposeful endeavors grow out of their God-guided conviction.

THE RISE OF INFLUENCE

Go into any community and you will find certain influential persons. How did they reach this standing? Enter any business corporation and you will soon learn whose word carries most weight. How did this come about? Become interested in any church, or religious organization, and the fact will soon be patent that certain persons are most consulted and their advice taken. What is the explanation of this? What is back of the rise to influence of these persons?

Deborah was influential in Israel because of her broad interest in the welfare of the people, because she was wise in her decisions and constructive in her advice. She was sympathetic with the problems of the people. She was openly ready to help wherever she could. She put her best into the tasks before her, even when no personal gain could possibly come to her in return. She believed in the willingness and ability of God to assist her and the people. She proved her worth by her work.

DARING FOR A CAUSE

What shall we say was the great characteristic of Deborah? Was it not her daring spirit when the cause of her people was in the balance? Whence came this courageous spirit? It was partly inherent and partly the result of divine preparation. God raised her up for the place she was to fill. One thing this woman required was daring, heroic approach to a trying task, unswerving determination to see the matter through.

Had she lacked in daring, she could not have inspired Barak and held him and his soldiers to the plan of battle.

But let us not suppose that to be daring we must be noisy and boastful and lordly. The quiet stand for right often lasts longer than the shouting tirade against the wrong. At times there must be the open fight, the rasping attack, the lion's roar against evil. But always there must be the daring that shirks not, but strikes the needed blows. These blows may be by word, by well-laid plans, by unrestrained antagonism. But every good cause advances most when its protagonists are more concerned in building it up than in tearing down an opposing cause. Deborah gloated over Sisera's defeat, but her gladness came from the delivery of her people.

THE POTENCY OF A TRUSTED PERSONALITY

Military annals often record how the example of the commander inspired the discouraged soldiers to rally and win. The records of the Christian Church are dotted with accounts of men and women whose personalities dominated the people for righteousness. Each of us knows of persons like that. Something about them seems to lift them into places of power.

Jesus had this power in the highest degree. His personality was potent. His enemies quaked before Him; His disciples were masterful men when they were near Him. Today when adults and youths come under the potency of His personality their trust becomes beautiful and they welcome hardest tasks for Him.

Why does the child think mother knows best? Why will he resent any suggestion that she might be wrong? His experiences have taught him how remarkable she is. He learns to depend on her for food and comfort and protection. She is his helper, his companion. He knows no person equal to her. The power of her personality dominates him.

HOW GOD CO-OPERATES

Deborah sang about the victory over the Canaanites. She gave God credit for what was achieved. She told how God had worked with them in sending the storm and the rain. She believed that nature under God's direction had fought their successful battle. Added to the fine work of the ten thousand soldiers was God's working with them.

Do we know how God co-operates with us? How much have we done by ourselves? Do we recognize how He has employed nature, and circumstances in working with us? Have we come to the place where we seek His co-operation? In our plans for self advancement He is ready to co-operate. When we strive for world betterment He wants to assist us. As we read His word, and grow spiritually and work in His Church, we can have His co-operation.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

Read the Bible references. Study the lives of Josiah's predecessors. What was the religious condition when he began to reign? List the reforms he started. How did he learn the law of God? How did that influence him? What was the passover?

NAOMI AND RUTH: A STUDY IN RACIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Lesson V
August 3

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LESSON TEXT: The Book of Ruth. (Print 1:6-10, 14-22.)

(American Standard Revision Text)

1:6. Then she arose with her daughters-in-law, that she might return from the country of Moab: for she had heard in the country of Moab how that Jehovah had visited his people in giving them bread.

7. And she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return unto the land of Judah.

8. And Naomi said unto her two daughters-in-law, Go, return each of you to her mother's house: Jehovah deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me.

9. Jehovah grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voice, and wept.

10. And they said unto her, Nay, but we will return with thee unto thy people.

14. And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law; but Ruth clave unto her.

15. And she said, Behold, thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her people, and unto her god: return thou after thy sister-in-law.

16. And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee, and to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God;

17. where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: Jehovah do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me.

18. And when she saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, she left off speaking unto her.

19. So they two went until they came to Beth-lehem. And it came to pass, when they were come to Beth-lehem, that all the city was moved about them, and *the women* said, Is this Naomi?

20. And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara; for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me.

21. I went out full, and Jehovah hath brought me home again empty; why call ye me Naomi, seeing Jehovah hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?

22. So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, with her, who returned out of the country of Moab: and they came to Beth-lehem in the beginning of barley harvest.

GOLDEN TEXT.—And he made of one every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth.—Acts 17:26.

LESSON GOAL.—To foster that spirit which will promote happy and helpful relationships between people of different races.

LESSON PLAN

I. RUTH A TRUE FRIEND. (Ruth 1.)

1. Naomi's Loss.
2. Naomi's Gain.
3. Ruth's Wise Choice.

II. RUTH A FAITHFUL SERVANT. (Ruth 2.)

1. Ruth the Gleaner.
2. Boaz the Generous.

III. RUTH A HAPPY WIFE. (Ruth 3 and 4.)

1. Boaz Redeems the Inheritance.
2. Boaz Marries Ruth.

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

Verse 9: *That ye may find rest . . . in the house of your husband.*
—There was no place of happiness in the scheme of things for the

unmarried woman, whether maid or widow, in the East of antiquity or in many Eastern lands today. Only in the house of a husband could a woman be secure. Hence the Hebrews spoke of the husband's house as the woman's "menuchah," or rest.

Naomi's best wish for her daughters-in-law was that they might speedily marry again.

Verse 17: *The Lord do so to me and more also.*—The common formula, "God do so to me," is not a vow but an imprecation upon one's own person of the evil in question if he does not fulfill that which he has engaged to do.

Verse 19: *All the city was moved about them.*—In the Eastern village life is very simple. The news of the arrival of any stranger quickly spreads even without a daily paper. The women speak of it at the village fountain as they wait in turn to fill their water jars. The return of Naomi after an absence of ten years was a notable event. Courtesy required that all friends and even acquaintances should call to express their joy over the return.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

Dr. James Hastings has this to say of the Book of Ruth: "In the Bible we have the Book of Judges, full of war and tumult; and the Book of Samuel, full of more war and tumult. Men hate and steal and lie and kill until the heart is sick with the havoc which sin has wrought among men. But between these two books, as a beautiful valley full of flowers and fertile fields and with a gentle brook singing down through the meadows as often found between two mountain ranges, is the Book of Ruth, a wonderful story of love and holy character, filling all that part of the Old Testament with its fragrance."

The quiet life, the mutual affection, the spirit of racial good-will, and the loyalty to Jehovah it depicts, stand out in marked contrast to the disturbances, lawlessness, apostasies and wars recorded in the other books that belong to the same period of Jewish history. It gives us to understand that in those faithless times there were many faithful souls, and that not all was darkness and night.

If you will turn to the close of the Book of Ruth you will find that the last word is the name of Israel's most illustrious king, David. It can hardly be doubted that part of the purpose the author had in mind in writing the book was to provide the genealogy of this king. Boaz and Ruth were the great-grandparents of David, and both names are to be found in the genealogical table of our Saviour as recorded in the first chapter of Matthew. There are those who feel that the book was written in part also as a protest against the strict enforcement of the law prohibiting the Jews from marrying among other races. Of this we cannot be sure, though it could well have been used for that purpose.

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

Famines were not of uncommon occurrence in Palestine, especially in the southern part. One descended upon Bethlehem and its vicinity in the days of the judges, and those who did not have sufficient food stored up against such a time were forced to go elsewhere in the hope of making a living. Under these circumstances Elimelech and his family emigrated to Moab, a country lying to the east of the Dead Sea. The two sons took to themselves wives from among the Moabites.

RUTH A TRUE FRIEND

1:6-22. *Naomi's Loss.* Naomi was not alone made suffer the inconvenience of removal from her home, and the pangs of hunger which the famine brought upon her, but within the short period of ten years she was forced to suffer the loss of her husband and two sons, as though in punishment for some terrible evil which had been committed. Whatever may have been the relationship between the Israelites and the Moabites, and we have reason to believe it was not one of hostility, we know that all Jews were loath to leave their own land and settle among heathen. We have good ground for believing from the tone of the entire story that Naomi interpreted the events as a direct visitation from God. However, she continued to put her trust in Him.

We can scarcely believe that the famine lasted ten years, and yet it could easily have been that long before the people of that stricken community were financially on their feet again, and until affairs so shaped themselves that Naomi could plan her return.

Naomi's Gain. The finest piece of good fortune that came to Naomi during her sojourn in a strange land was the intimate friendship of two daughters-in-law of the character of Ruth and Orpah. As she set out for her homeland they planned to accompany her part of the way, as was the custom. When they had gone some distance together she bade them return to their own land and marry among their own people. She could see nothing for them in Bethlehem; and though it almost broke her heart to have them leave her, thinking of their future good alone, she begged them, amid loud lamentations, to return to their own home.

Ruth's Wise Choice. We have to be careful not to belittle the choice Orpah made. Possibly for her it was as wise as the one Ruth made, though the two were very different. It has been thoughtfully remarked of Orpah, "As she stands at the parting of the ways, hesitating and weeping, as she reluctantly decides to return, as she kisses the woman she has learned to love, and moves slowly back to her accustomed home, our sympathy goes with her, and we find nothing in her conduct which is not perfectly tender and womanly." But with that the story of Orpah ends. We know nothing more of her.

From the sequel we know that Ruth's choice was a very wise one. We cannot be sure that she had decided to go all the way with Naomi until the moment of separation came. That she loved Naomi is certain, but the depth of that love may have been felt only when the time to say farewell came. She declined to listen to the entreaties of her mother-in-law. It was impressed upon her that she should go the whole distance, and identify herself completely with the future and the fortunes of the woman she had come to love as she loved her own life. She was not stubborn, but she had a firm will. In language that has become immortal she summed up what she regarded to be her duty under the circumstances. Nothing could turn her from her chosen course. It

was no easy thing for her to give up her land, her friends, and all her past; but she was convinced that more lay ahead of her than back of her. Journeying together they came to Bethlehem in the spring of the year, at the time of the barley harvest.

RUTH A FAITHFUL SERVANT

2:1-23. The two women when they reached Bethlehem were poor. It would be necessary for them to make their living. Ruth was young and strong, and not unwilling to work. In the neighborhood lived a very rich man, by the name of Boaz, and he was a relative of Naomi's husband. Ruth requested that she be permitted to go out and glean in the barley fields. Now gleaning was a very humble task, and was followed by the widow, the orphan, and the very poor.

It was against the law for the owner of a field to gather all the grain when the harvesting was being done. He was to instruct his men to leave some gleanings for the poor to gather. When Boaz had come to the field and greeted his men, he saw a woman following the reapers and gathering grain. Upon inquiry he learned who she was. He instructed them to leave her not only gleanings but sheaves as well. He charged the men that no harm befall her, and told her that when she was thirsty she was to drink of the water that the young men had drawn. He further requested of her that she glean only in his field. Through the kindness of Boaz she had a goodly quantity of grain, about a bushel, when evening came. Upon her return home she told Naomi where she had been, in whose field she had gathered grain, the name of the owner and the generosity he had shown her. It pleased Naomi to learn that the man was none other than Boaz, and that he had not "left off his kindness" now that Elimelech, his kinsman, had died. Naomi may already have seen the beginnings of a romance in the story Ruth told her. At any rate she advised Ruth to gather grain only in the field of Boaz.

RUTH A HAPPY WIFE

3:1-4:22. Before Elimelech and his family left Bethlehem he was forced to sell his property. Boaz knew that, and he also knew there was a law requiring that the land be redeemed, or bought back so that it might remain in the family. Boaz felt interested in this transaction. But he was not the nearest of kin by whom the purchase should be made. Sending Ruth home Boaz took the necessary steps to learn if the nearest kinsman would redeem the property. Finding him he asked him in the presence of ten elders whether he was willing to fulfil the requirements of the law. He was willing to purchase the land, but when he learned that it also meant that he should take Ruth to wife he declined. This gave Boaz the right to meet the requirement of the law, which he did by purchasing the land and marrying Ruth, the Moabitess, who became the ancestress of David and Jesus.

NAOMI AND RUTH: A STUDY IN RACIAL RELATIONSHIPS

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

THE LITTLE BOOKS

I wonder if we are not in danger of overlooking the little books of the Bible. We may get the impression that they do not contain much that is worth while because they have so few chapters in them. But they have a message, and one that may be very precious indeed. Fred B. Smith has this to say about his favorite book of the Bible.

"If by 'favorite' I should mean the book in the Bible which means most to me spiritually, I should certainly say John's Gospel. But I am rather of the impression that, if my 'favorite book' were to be indicated by the one I read most, I should say the book of Ruth. I believe this is so because I put such a very, very high estimate upon unchangeable fidelity and loyalty to principles and to friends.

"There is an immense amount of life that is unstable, and drifts with every changing wind, and I find myself so much that sort of creature that it becomes necessary for me often to read the book of Ruth to keep myself anchored to the truths and traditions I hold fundamental."

COMMON GRIEF THE BASIS OF FRIENDSHIPS

Some of the best friends we have are those we made while they and we were passing through deep waters. We were acquaintances before, now we are fast friends. Let us be swift to learn that sorrow cannot be an unmixed evil so long as it binds human hearts together. Some of the best and most trusted friends we have never got close to us until the day when they were able to minister to us, or we were able to minister to them. Naomi and Ruth felt their hearts being strangely knit together as they wept over the same losses and went in quest of the same comfort. There are blessings in the things that bring us pain.

LIVING OUR RELIGION

We have emphasized almost to the point of monotony the necessity of our being true to our religion no matter where we chance to be. We are requested to make this lesson a study in racial relationships. If we ever expect to bring other peoples to our way of thinking religiously, is it conceivable that this can possibly be done unless we remain vigorously loyal to our own faith? There was something about Naomi's manner and habits of conduct that deeply impressed Ruth and Orpah. The alienation of Ruth from her idolatrous practices and her incorporation into the beliefs of Israel were accomplished long before she set foot on the soil of Bethlehem. What is it that most influences foreigners toward Christianity, teaching or practice? What we say or what we do? Creedal or ethical standards? If we cannot go out among all men with the spirit of the Gospel, it is useless for us to think we shall make an impression with the words of the Gospel.

NOBLE QUALITIES UNIVERSAL

It is questionable business for any nation of people to set themselves up as superior to others. The Jews had a habit of doing that. They

thought no other race was comparable to themselves. They looked down on others, not regarding them worthy of respect. We find ourselves giving expression to the same feelings of superiority. But who told us we are better than others? By what right do we set the standard? No doubt Naomi shrank from going into Moab. How could she ever make herself at home with those people? And yet where she did not expect to find love, and friendliness, and loyalty, she found them in their highest form. Are we not often amazed at the kindness, the strength, the virtue, we see where we had imagined they did not exist? Our language has been exhausted in our search for words wherewith to express our admiration for Ruth, the foreigner.

THE POWER OF A WORTHY EXAMPLE

Ruth spoke volumes when she declared to Naomi, "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." To lead others into fellowship with our people and with our God is a privilege all of us have. Some one is sure to do the leading. Ruth did not cling to this woman from Bethlehem because she expected any material advantage from it. The reason for it went deeper. She was charmed by the beauty of life she saw. She found herself being changed into the same image.

Two young men, who had come from very different homes and out of very different surroundings, met in a city boarding house. They became roommates and fast friends. One was an undisciplined boy, in no way vicious, but without definite principles or convictions. The other was a strong, earnest fellow who had been brought up in a small village, and had been an active worker in the home church. The two had no difficulty in finding which of them was the natural leader. They formed the same habits of life; they attended the same church; they gradually assumed definite responsibilities; and both developed into strong, useful manhood.

Looking back over his life in those days, he who had been the undisciplined boy, said: "I cannot think of any greater blessing that could have befallen me than the friendship of this young man, who had so much in common with me, but who had, too, so much that I lacked. He did for me what no teacher or pastor or employer could have done, and he did it with perfect naturalness, and, indeed, unconsciously!"

"What was the secret of his influence over you?" asked a friend. "He made his religion so wholesomely attractive," was the reply.—*Youth's Companion*.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

What gift did Hannah covet most? What promise did she make the Lord on condition He would hear her prayer? With what sin did Eli the high priest accuse her? How did she regard the son whom God gave her?

Read Hannah's song of thanksgiving in 2: 1-11, and compare it with the Magnificat by Mary in Luke 1: 46-55. What service did little Samuel render? What does the Bible lead you to conclude is the most far-reaching field of influence a woman may occupy? Name a few of the world's greatest mothers.

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LESSON TEXT: I Samuel 1:1-28; 2:1-11, 18, 19; 3:1-18. (Print 1:9-18, 24-28; 2:19.)

(American Standard Revision Text)

1:9. So Hannah rose up after they had eaten in Shiloh, and after they had drunk. Now Eli the priest was sitting upon his seat by the door-post of the temple of Jehovah.

10. And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto Jehovah, and wept sore.

11. And she vowed a vow, and said, O Jehovah of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thy handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thy handmaid, but wilt give unto thy handmaid a man-child, then I will give him unto Jehovah all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head.

12. And it came to pass, as she continued praying before Jehovah, that Eli marked her mouth.

13. Now Hannah, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard: therefore Eli thought she had been drunken.

14. And Eli said unto her, How long wilt thou be drunken? put away thy wine from thee.

15. And Hannah answered and said, No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I poured out my soul before Jehovah.

16. Count not thy handmaid for a wicked woman; for out of the abun-

dance of my complaint and my provocation have I spoken hitherto.

17. Then Eli answered and said, Go in peace; and the God of Israel grant thy petition that thou hast asked of him.

18. And she said, Let thy handmaid find favor in thy sight. So the woman went her way, and did eat; and her countenance was no more sad.

24. And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with three bullocks, and one ephah of meal, and a bottle of wine, and brought him unto the house of Jehovah in Shiloh: and the child was young.

25. And they slew the bullock, and brought the child to Eli.

26. And she said, Oh, my Lord, as thy soul liveth, my lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto Jehovah.

27. For this child I prayed; and Jehovah hath given me my petition which I asked of him:

28. therefore also I have granted him to Jehovah; as long as he liveth he is granted to Jehovah. And he worshipped Jehovah there.

2:19. Moreover his mother made him a little robe, and brought it to him from year to year, when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice.

GOLDEN TEXT: My son, hear the instruction of thy father, And forsake not the law of thy mother.—Proverbs 1:8.

LESSON GOAL.—To show the influences for good a godly mother will have over her child.

LESSON PLAN

I. SAMUEL'S BIRTH. (I Sam. 1:1—2:11.)

1. An Answer to Prayer.
2. Loaned to the Lord.
3. A Song of Thanksgiving.

II. SAMUEL IN TRAINING. (I Sam. 2:18, 19.)

III. SAMUEL'S CALL. (I Sam. 3:1-18.)

1. In the House of Jehovah.
2. Without Experience.
3. The Call Accepted.
4. The Message Received.

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

Verse 10: *And wept sore.*—Contrary to the custom of the West, tears are not kept to be shed in secret. In Eastern lands the suppression of demonstrations of feeling is far from commendable.

Verse 11: *And she vowed a vow . . . there shall no razor come upon his head.*—The most important class of negative vows was that of Nazirite vows. Samson and John the Baptist were Nazirites from their birth by God's appointment. So also Samuel by the vow of his mother.

The observance of three rules was strictly enjoined upon the Nazirite: he should abstain from the product of the vine in every form; he should leave his hair unshorn; he must not defile himself by the touch of a dead body even though it were of near kin.

The underlying idea was of special devotion to God. Abstaining from the use of a razor was a sign of his consecration.

11:19: *His mother made him a little robe.*—The robe, or mantle, in our version, was a second tunic fuller than the first and worn over it. It was made of linen without sleeves and extended to the feet.

It was woven in one piece with slits for the head and arms to pass through.

It does not seem to have been worn by the masses of people, but only by those of the higher grades of society.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

There are two towns in today's lesson which interest the Bible student, the one being Ramah, where Samuel was born, and the other Shiloh, where the tabernacle was located.

As one travels from Nazareth to Jerusalem over the backbone of the land, and over a very well-made highway, he is asked, when six or eight miles out of Jerusalem, to look westward, that is, toward the Great Sea, and told that not very far away is the site of Ramah, where Samuel first saw the light of day. While we cannot be certain the guide is probably giving correct information. As I turn to my "Nelson Bible Atlas," in the American Standard Version of the Bible, I find this Ramah, for there were several towns by that name, is almost directly north of Jerusalem. It is where Samuel was born, where he had his residence, and where he was buried.

Of Shiloh Dr. Schmauk in *Bible Geography* says: "About twelve miles south of Shechem and several miles east of the road between Shechem and Jerusalem is Shiloh. Here Joshua divided the land to the tribes, and here the ark and tabernacle were kept from the last days of Joshua to the time of Samuel. The scenes connected with Eli the aged judge, who lived in the tabernacle, and little Samuel, and the death of Eli on hearing of the loss of the ark occurred here."

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

That the teacher may start out with a correct impression it should be remarked that the period in which Samuel was born was one of the darkest in all the history of Israel. It was dark with the darkness that precedes the dawn. Eli was a good-natured high priest, but without very much force, especially in his advanced years, and unable to stem the rising tide of wickedness. Even the lives of his sons were characterized by gross selfishness, violence and immorality.

SAMUEL'S BIRTH

But true religion had not wholly ceased. Among those who remained faithful were Elkanah, the Levite, and his wife Hannah, who came regularly to the feasts. Hannah, however, was far from happy. No child had blessed her union with Elkanah, and because of this she felt humiliated and disgraced in spite of the rare devotion of her husband. It was the desire of every woman in Israel to be the mother of children. More than that, Hannah was provoked and made fret by her rival, Peninnah, who was the mother of children.

While in the tabernacle Hannah took the matter to the Lord, pouring out her soul before Him and earnestly entreating that the desire of her heart be granted, vowing that if she might become the mother of a male child she would dedicate him to the service of the sanctuary. To her great joy the prayer was answered, and faithfully was her vow kept.

But it was the mother's desire to perpetuate the memory of the goodness of God to her, and she did it by giving the boy a name which would be suggestive of her experience. So she called him Samuel, meaning, "name of God," or "his name is God." "The addition of the words 'Because I have asked him of Jehovah' was not intended to give a scientific derivation of the name, but merely to connect it with the circumstances of Samuel's birth." This name whenever mentioned would remind the mother of her prayer and vow, and would also prove an inspiration and a safeguard to Samuel all through his life. It is not surprising that this child later on proved that there is power in prayer.

Hannah continued long in prayer. When the high priest Eli saw her lips moving, but giving forth no sound, he supposed that she was a drunken woman. "That excess in wine was not an infrequent concomitant of religious feasts seems to be indicated by the readiness with which the suspicion is entertained here." Similar sights were common to Eli, and this made him the more inclined to place Hannah in the same class. He rebuked her for appearing before the Lord in that condition and told her to put away her wine. Hannah was surprised at the charge, which she repelled at once. If it was true that many of the women at the feast took occasion to drink to excess and become the daughters of Belial, she was not of that group. She was not drunk with wine, but was filled with the Spirit. She was a woman of a heavy heart, and she had come to the Lord for comfort. When Eli heard what she had to say he not only dismissed her in peace, but also added the prayer that her petition might be granted.

Elkanah continued his annual visits to the tabernacle to attend the feast, but Hannah remained at home until the child was old enough to take away, which was two or three years. When the time came for her to appear before the Lord with her son, she took with her sacrifices and gifts befitting the occasion and the gladness of her heart.

Hannah's song of thanksgiving in the second chapter is one of the most beautiful poems in the whole Bible. It is reverent throughout, and

is an acknowledgment of faith in the sovereign power of the Lord. It is called the Magnificat of the Old Testament.

SAMUEL IN TRAINING

2:18, 19. The child was now found in the tabernacle, which was located at Shiloh, some twelve miles from Ramah. He was under the care of Eli who, because of the ineffectual training of his own sons, seems to have become all the more careful of little Samuel, "guiding his early years in reverent devotion to Jehovah's service."

While Hannah was not again to have her son at home, she did not permit her interest in his growing usefulness to decrease. It was her sincere hope that, since he was in the tabernacle, the house of the Lord, and under Eli, he would grow up to fulfil all her prayer for him.

But while he could not come to her, she could go to him, and this she did every year, taking with her a small garment which he would need for the service he was to render in the house of the Lord. "Doubtless the cloth was spun and woven by his mother, as well as the robe cut and sewed by her."

SAMUEL'S CALL

3:1-18. Through eight or ten years Samuel had been ministering before the Lord. He was probably twelve years of age when the call of this chapter came to him. He was taught by Eli as the lad was able to understand the truth. The need of such teaching is indicated by the statement that the word of the Lord was precious, or rare, in those days. The kingdom had fallen upon an era of spiritual poverty. There were few persons fit to receive the revelation God desired to make. But in Samuel there was one growing up who could receive a special message.

The time of Samuel's special call was in the early morning. The lamps had been filled with oil so that they would burn through the night, and they had not yet gone out. Eli and Samuel were sleeping in the same room, or in adjacent rooms, and near the ark of Jehovah.

Suddenly there came a voice calling Samuel. The lad, not yet having been taught the ways God may speak to men, thought it was Eli calling. Being startled at hearing his name, he arose and rushed to the side of his spiritual father. Eli thought the lad had been dreaming and sent him back to bed. Presently the call was renewed, and Samuel, more convinced than before it was the voice of Eli, reported to him again, only to be told once more to go and lie down.

At this point there enters the explanation that Samuel did not know Jehovah, which means that he had not previously received any direct communication from Him; so far his knowledge of the Lord came through Eli. A third time the call came and again Samuel went to Eli with the usual question. Now Eli perceived that the boy was not dreaming, but that God was calling him; thereupon he instructed him how to answer if the voice should come again. The voice of the Lord did come again, and His presence, too, and the message was to the effect that the wickedness of Eli's house would be blotted out.

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

THE GROWING CHARACTER

"The continuous growth of a character from a child serving God, and to old age walking in the same path, is the great lesson which the story of Samuel teaches us. 'The child is father of the man,' and all his long days are 'bound each to each' by true religion . . . Samuel is the pattern of child religion and service. How beautifully this double obedience is expressed in the simple words! His service was 'unto the Lord,' and it was 'before Eli'; that is to say, he learned his work from the old man, and in obeying him he served God. The child's religion is largely obedience to human guides, and he serves God best by doing what he is bid—a lesson needed in our days by both parents and children."—*Dr. Alexander Maclaren.*

THE HOMES OF CHRISTIAN LEADERS

The home is an ancient institution. God established it for several reasons, and one was that there should be a shelter for the fostering of religion. When the state wants citizens it must go back to the home. When the Church wants members it must go back to the home. Like home, like Church. Like home, like society. The family gives shape and character to life everywhere. We are told that seventy-five per cent of the ministers of this country come out of godly, praying homes. The moral fiber of the next generation is being woven back in the homes you and I know today. It is there that we have the right to expect that protection to be offered children which will insure them a proper start in life. It stands to reason that the breakup of the family means ultimately the dissolution of every institution known to man.

TRAINING THE CHILDREN

"It is a great thing to bring prodigals back from the far country, but it is a greater thing to protect a child from its evil lure, and to teach him that true happiness is found only in the Father's house of love and obedience. 'Suffer the little children to come unto me' is the wise word of Jesus. He who spoke that word knew its meaning in His own experience, for was not His first public appearance in the temple at Jerusalem, where He astonished all His hearers by the spiritual wisdom of His words? I do honestly believe that the supreme task of the Church today is the religious instruction of the child. And this task is made all the more imperative by the general lack of religious instruction in the home, by the absence of definite religious instruction in the schools, by the enormous growth of books perilous to the young, by the careless cynicism of much of our popular journalism, and by the debasement of many of our forms of popular amusement."—*Dr. W. J. Dawson, quoted in Tarbell's Teachers' Guide.*

EARLY SPIRITUAL NURTURE

Those who entertain the notion that the time to begin the training of children is at the age of twelve begin about twelve years too late.

We have been learning from other sources than the Bible that the time this training should start is in infancy. That we are not able to understand how a helpless babe can receive good impressions and be planted in the house of the Lord does not alter the established fact that these things are possible. Early training is the best training.

A boy went to church and heard the story of the ninety and nine, which impressed him very deeply. He went home and told his father that he wanted to become a Christian and join the church. "Oh, you are too young!" was the father's answer. That evening a storm came up, and his father told him to go out and run the sheep into the fold. The boy was off to his task and presently returned. "Did you get the sheep all in?" inquired the father. "I put all the old sheep in," replied the boy. "You don't mean to tell me that you left all the lambs out in the storm, do you?" "Why, of course, father, for I thought they were too young." The father could not speak for a moment. The larger truth dawned upon him. Then he said, "You are right, my son. You may become a Christian and unite with the Church, if you want to. You are not too young."

THE PLACE OF THE MOTHER

Whatever else a woman may do, she will never do anything greater than build a home and train her children up in the fear and admonition of the Lord. We do not begrudge her the modern liberty she enjoys, and the right to enter the professions; but we still claim that the home is her throne and home-making her major function. Many women have made a name for themselves in other spheres, and they are likely to continue doing so in larger numbers; still as long as time lasts her kind will be known best by the service they render in the domestic circle, and by the character of the sons and daughters they give to the world.

SACRED VOWS

"Hannah's fidelity to her vows to God does not permit her to enjoy the sweet and tender ministries of motherhood to the little boy beyond the period when it would be necessary that the 'child be weaned.' Into these few years, probably three or four, what a richness and intensity of maternal affection and vigilance must have been compressed! With what chary self-care did Hannah drive sleep from her eyes, lest unnecessary slumber should even for an hour rob her of the vision of the boy who was so long in coming to her embrace, and whom she would so soon with trembling gladness yield up to the life and service at the temple of Shiloh."—*Bishop J. F. Hurst.*

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

What happened to cause Israel to change from a theocracy to a monarchy? What qualities did the people expect to find in the man who should rule over them? What points of strength did Saul show during his rule? Wherein did his weakness consist? Why did Samuel withdraw his support from him? Do you think that the disaster of his reign was in any sense an expression of the judgment of God on the people for their insistence to have a king?

SAUL: A MAN OF GREAT POSSIBILITIES WHO FAILED

Lesson VII
August 17

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LESSON TEXT: I Samuel, chapters 8-11; 13; 15; 16:14-23; 19:9-12; 28; 31.
(Print 9:15-17, 25-27; 10:1; 19:9-11; 31:1-4.)

(American Standard Revision Text)

9:15. Now Jehovah had revealed unto Samuel a day before Saul came, saying,

16. To-morrow about this time I will send thee a man out of the land of Benjamin, and thou shalt anoint him to be prince over my people Israel; and he shall save my people out of the hand of the Philistines: for I have looked upon my people, because their cry is come unto me.

17. And when Samuel saw Saul, Jehovah said unto him, Behold, the man of whom I spake to thee! this same shall have authority over my people.

25. And when they were come down from the high place into the city, he communed with Saul upon the house-top.

26. And they arose early: and it came to pass about the spring of the day, that Samuel called to Saul on the housetop, saying, Up, that I may send thee away. And Saul arose, and they went out both of them, he and Samuel, abroad.

27. As they were going down at the end of the city, Samuel said to Saul, Bid the servant pass on before us (and he passed on), but stand thou still first, that I may cause thee to hear the word of God.

10:1. Then Samuel took the vial of oil, and poured it upon his head, and kissed him, and said, Is it not that Jehovah hath anointed thee to be prince

over his inheritance?

19:9. And an evil spirit from Jehovah was upon Saul, as he sat in his house with his spear in his hand; and David was playing with his hand.

10. And Saul sought to smite David even to the wall with the spear; but he slipped away out of Saul's presence, and he smote the spear into the wall: and David fled, and escaped that night.

11. And Saul sent messengers unto David's house, to watch him, and to slay him in the morning: and Michal, David's wife, told him, saying, If thou save not thy life tonight, tomorrow thou wilt be slain.

31:1. Now the Philistines fought against Israel: and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines, and fell down slain in mount Gilboa.

2. And the Philistines followed hard upon Saul and upon his sons; and the Philistines slew Jonathan, and Abinadab, and Malchishua, the sons of Saul.

3. And the battle went sore against Saul, and the archers overtook him; and he was greatly distressed by reason of the archers.

4. Then said Saul to his armorbearer, Draw thy sword, and thrust me through therewith, lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and abuse me. But his armorbearer would not; for he was sore afraid. Therefore Saul took his sword, and fell upon it.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.—I Corinthians 10:12.

LESSON GOAL.—To learn from the early years of the Jewish monarchy that whatever sources of help we may find in man we must never forget that our reliance is upon God.

LESSON PLAN

I. SAUL CHOSEN KING. (I Sam. 8-11.)

1. The Demand of the People.
2. The Protest of Samuel.
3. Anointed by Samuel.
4. Elected by the People.

II. SAUL SHOWS SIGNS OF WEAKNESS. (I Sam. 13; 15; 16:14-23.)

1. By Impatience.
2. By Wilful Disobedience.
3. By Yielding to an Evil Spirit.

III. SAUL REJECTED. (I Sam. 19:9-12; 28: 31.)

1. Attempts to Slay David.
2. His Doom Pronounced.
3. Slain on Mount Gilboa.

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

Verse 16: *Thou shalt anoint him.*—The rite of inauguration to the position of king was anointing with the sacred oil. When this was performed privately by a prophet under God's direction it conferred simply the title to the throne. The public anointing signified the induction into the office of king.

Verse 25: *Upon the housetop.*—The housetop of the Oriental house is flat. A wall two or three feet high extends around it. This protection is necessary since, during the greater part of the year, the nights are spent on the housetop. In some houses the roof is of flat stones but in many villages it is made of mud. This necessitates rolling and leveling after a rain, hence a roller is usually seen on the roof ready for use.

19:9: *Playing with his hand.*—David, the musician, was evidently playing some stringed instrument, possibly a lute or a harp.

Verse 10: *The spear.*—The chief weapons of offense were the sword, spear and javelin. The spear was of wood with an iron blade. The other end was pointed so that it could be stuck in the ground.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

Affairs in Israel had not been running well since the death of Joshua. He had been appointed of God primarily for the purpose of leading His people in the conquest and distribution of the land of Canaan. He had displayed remarkable strength and wisdom in the undertaking. We can readily see how the accomplishment of a task of such proportions would serve to keep the tribes united. Even the two tribes and a half that chose to settle on the east of the Jordan went with their brethren across the river to fight alongside of them. A division in their ranks would have jeopardized the interest of all of them.

But when the tribes settled in the sections of the land allotted them there did not seem to be the need of preserving that solidarity they had previously known. Each tribe began to live for itself. There was no leader among them strong enough to create and preserve a central form of government. The judges were individuals raised up of God to resist the invasion of foreign nations. There were only a few of them who showed the capacity for large leadership. Among these few Samuel was the ablest. He was one of the men who had the vision, the spiritual power, and the statesmanlike qualities required to set before the nation an objective commanding enough to engage the support of all its tribes.

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

SAUL CHOSEN KING

Chapters 8-11. Up to this time Israel had been a theocracy, that is, a God-ruled nation. God had been King. But the people were not satisfied with the method of divine administration. The past had not been to their liking, and the future as they regarded it was not bright with hope. They thought they knew a better way, and they began clamoring for a king.

One cannot altogether blame them for the position they took. They had good memories, and they recalled many disasters. Eli had not been

a particularly able ruler and guide. And unspiritual as most of the people were they had been utterly shocked at the selfish and immoral conduct of Eli's sons, who had held the position of priests. Samuel, it is true, had been greatly beloved, for he had been a faithful servant, and against him very few had anything to say. But he was old, and his days numbered. He would soon be taken from them. But then it was clearly seen that his sons were not of his character; instead they were mercenary and profligate. They could not be depended on.

The people were also conscious of the fact that there was no man in sight of the proportions of a great leader to succeed Samuel. From their viewpoint the future looked dark. But instead of turning to God for leading they decided to fall back on their own resources and act accordingly.

The suggestion of a king pleased them very much. Other nations had kings, why not Israel? A king could be the embodiment of all that was patriotic and chivalrous, and lead their armies to victory. Had it not been so among the nations that surrounded them? The difficulty was that they did not see this step would be the virtual rejection of the Lord. But Samuel saw it, and so he protested. So serious did the contemplated step appear to him that he took the matter to the Lord. The Lord said to him, "They have not rejected you; they have rejected me."

But the people refused to recede from their position. The best thing to be done under the circumstances was to appoint them a king. God told Samuel to proceed; but at the same time he was to tell them what some of the consequences of their choice would be. The outcome of self-will would not be pleasing to contemplate. With solemnity he gave them to understand that the king they might select would not be very different from the usual Oriental despot.

Saul was the son of Kish, a humble man belonging to the tribe of Benjamin. He went out one day to seek a drove of animals that had gone astray. After searching in vain for them his servant suggested a visit to the prophet Samuel. Saul acted on the suggestion, taking with him a fitting present for the man of God. In the meanwhile it had been intimated to Samuel that one would soon visit him who would be the future king of Israel. Samuel received the young man with honor, made known to him what God had revealed, anointed him and sent him away.

Samuel went to Mizpeh, called the people together there, and, after upbraiding them for having rejected the Lord, had them cast lots for a king. The lot fell upon Saul. The first exploits of the king were of such a character as to lead the people to believe that they had not made a mistake.

SAUL SHOWS SIGNS OF WEAKNESS

I Sam. 13:15; 16:14-23. One of the earliest campaigns Saul found it necessary for him to wage was against the Philistines, a per-

petual thorn in the side of God's people. They were a warlike people, the frequent conquerors of Israel, and haughty with it all. They began to gather a strong force with which to fight. The Israelites were afraid. Some fled beyond Jordan; others hid themselves in caves. Samuel had promised to appear and offer sacrifice unto the Lord before the battle should begin. But when he delayed his coming, Saul took the ill-advised step of offering the sacrifice himself. At that moment Samuel appeared and, seeing what had been done, he announced to Saul that the kingdom would pass from his house. Had it not been for the courage of Jonathan, Saul's noble son, the battle would have been lost.

A little later Samuel commissioned Saul on a campaign against the Amalekites, a people who lost no opportunity to harass and plunder the Israelites. And now the time had come for the visitation of long-deferred punishment upon them. The command the king received was that he should destroy the Amalekites root and branch. He proceeded upon his mission. He defeated the enemy, but failed to carry out his orders. When he returned he brought King Agag with him, possibly with the intention of adorning his procession; he also brought sheep and oxen for the purpose of enriching himself and rewarding his followers. This act on the part of Saul was a piece of egotism and disobedience that could not be condoned.

In 16: 14-23 we are able to see into what spiritual and mental deterioration Saul had come. The Spirit of the Lord had departed from him, while an evil spirit took possession of him.

SAUL REJECTED

I Sam. 19: 9-12; 28; 31. David was one of the best friends Saul had, and at the first found favor in his sight. But the shepherd lad, through his skilful exploits, began to receive such honors from the people as to throw the king into a fit of jealousy. Saul thought that if he could rid himself of David he would be able to re-establish himself on the throne. What did he do but seek to slay the young man, even going so far as to send men to his house to lie in wait for him!

Saul had come to his last battle with the Philistines. The armies were encamped by the blood-stained plain of Esdrealon. "The night before the battle, the terrified king of Israel stole along, behind Little Hermon, to Endor, a place lying half-way between that hill and Mount Tabor, and there had his celebrated interview with the witch. Though he had tried to exterminate the whole race of soothsayers and wizards, he had no recourse now but to go to a woman with a familiar spirit, and to ask her to call up the spirit of Samuel, who had been some time dead. His account of himself to Samuel is a vivid picture of the effects of forsaking God. 'I am sore distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets nor by dreams.' Samuel could only foretell his coming defeat and death."—*Blaikie*. The next day the battle was waged, and King Saul was among the dead.

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

GREAT POSSIBILITIES

This is one of the saddest lessons we are ever asked to study. The reason is not far to find. Saul gave promise of doing so well, and then failed miserably. We are asked to consider this lesson from the viewpoint of "A Man of Great Possibilities Who Failed." That man was Saul. He had much that was decidedly to his credit. He was well spoken of. His deeds had been meritorious. He had been dutiful at home, high-motivated, courageous, patriotic, and an able and inspiring leader. He had it in him to run well.

AN IMPOSED RESPONSIBILITY

There are those who would excuse Saul because he did not seek, yea did not want to be king. He confessed his unworthiness. He declared he was not fit for it. His family was one of the humblest of the small tribe of Benjamin. He was not able to find a valuable drove of lost animals belonging to his father, and yet he was expected to administer a kingdom wisely. When others had failed, as Eli's and Samuel's sons had done, the nation set its hopes on him and insisted that he bring it new glory. That was asking a vast deal. But Saul was equal to it.

SAUL'S IMPATIENCE

One of the first weaknesses manifested by Saul was his inability to await the arrival of Samuel to offer sacrifice preparatory to marching into battle against the Philistines. A Christian who knew how to study his Bible to get most out of it was reading in the thirty-seventh psalm one day where it says, "The steps of a good man are ordered of the Lord," and he added in the margin the words, "And so are the pauses." Saul did not know how to wait. He could not control the pauses. He showed his mistrust of the Lord.

SAUL'S JEALOUSY

Aside from Samuel Saul never came into close association with an individual who could have meant more to him than David. Yet he left no stone unturned to bring the young man to his grave. He could not endure seeing him rise in the affections of the people. When he went out to battle, Saul wished he would meet his death. And when he came back crowned with all the honor that strategy, courage and implicit faith in God can bestow the king's heart was full of jealousy. When the people cried, "Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands," he flew into a rage. He could not rid his soul of jealousy.

SAUL'S DISOBEDIENCE

Nothing can take the place of obedience. It heads the list of all God's orders. It must be made the law of our living at whatever cost. No second best can be tolerated. How cheap Saul looks as he stands confessing that he disobeyed the voice of the Lord, adding in substance that he thought it would be all right since he intended to offer a sacri-

fice to Him! It is not a gift the Lord wants, but obedience that grows out of love. To do what He enjoins is worth more than a thousand rivers of oil.

SAUL'S FALSEHOODS

The king did not feel under obligation to tell the truth when it did not suit his convenience. That weakness may be found running through his career. Take, for instance, the time when he returned from his campaign against the Amalekites. He greeted Samuel with the words: "I have performed the commandment of Jehovah." He knew better.

Many a one has lost his kingdom through lying. "It's a bargain you won't get in many a day, and if you're sharp you won't miss it." Ned Howell was trying to trade a pair of imitation gold cuff buttons with Ezra, the chore boy at his grandfather's, for six of his white fancy pigeons. Ezra had often been cheated by Ned, and was not so ready to believe all he said. The buttons looked nice, and Ned said they were real. "Don't paw them with your dirty hands if you are not going to take them," said Ned rudely. Ezra turned the buttons over and examined them more closely. "If you aren't sharp enough to make a good bargain for yourself, give them back to me." "I'll take them," said Ezra slowly, closing his hand over them. "I'll have the pigeons in a basket ready for you to take home with you tomorrow morning." Ned had a triumphant smile on his face as he saw Ezra go toward the barn. Uncle Frank had been listening to the conversation from his seat on the porch where he had been concealed by the vines. Presently he joined his nephew at the gate. "I wouldn't be a chore boy," said Ned. "Why?" asked Uncle Frank. "Oh, they have such rough, dirty work!" answered Ned. "Ezra's hands are always dirty. I would not touch them for anything." "Ezra's hands are cleaner than yours, to my mind," said Uncle Frank, gravely. "Why, what do you mean?" asked Ned in surprise. "I think dishonest bargains soil one's hands more than honest work," replied his uncle. Ned's face grew very red. "It was not my fault if he did not know how to make a good bargain," muttered Ned. "He simply took your word for the value of the buttons." "I did not say they were gold, I only said real buttons." "It was just as much a lie as if you had said real gold. You cannot call your hands clean, my boy, when you stain them by lying and cheating." After this Ned felt so uncomfortable that he went and confessed to Ezra. "Ezra, I cheated you about those buttons. They aren't real gold, they are worth about twenty-five cents. Keep the pigeons till I send you the money for them." Ned's lying came near costing him his kingdom.—*The Illustrator*.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

To what honorable position was Jonathan heir that might have led him to doubt the wisdom of befriending David? What caused him to take a stand against his father in favor of David? Into what covenant did the two young men enter? How far is it expected of us that we observe the commandment to obey our parents? Why did not Jonathan try to take a neutral attitude? What is there to show that David intended to do Saul no harm? What are the characteristics of a true friend? How shall we find worthy friends?

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LESSON TEXT: I Samuel 18:1-4; 19:1-7; chap. 20; II Samuel 1:17-27. (Print I Samuel 18:1-4; 20:14-17, 32-34, 41, 42; II Samuel 1:25-27.)

(American Standard Revision Text)

I Samuel 18:1. And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.

2. And Saul took him that day, and would let him go no more home to his father's house.

3. Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul.

4. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his apparel, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle.

20:14. And thou shalt not only while yet I live show me the lovingkindness of Jehovah, that I die not;

15. but also thou shalt not cut off thy kindness from my house for ever; no, not when Jehovah hath cut off the enemies of David every one from the face of the earth.

16. So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, And Jehovah will require it at the hand of David's enemies.

17. And Jonathan caused David to swear again, for the love that he had to him; for he loved him as he loved his own soul.

32. And Jonathan answered Saul his father, and said unto him, Wherefore should he be put to death? what hath he done?

33. And Saul cast his spear at him to smite him; whereby Jonathan knew that it was determined of his father to put David to death.

34. So Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger, and did eat no food the second day of the month; for he was grieved for David, because his father had done him shame.

41. And as soon as the lad was gone, David arose out of a place toward the South, and fell on his face to the ground, and bowed himself three times; and they kissed one another, and wept one with another, until David exceeded.

42. And Jonathan said to David, Go in peace, forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of Jehovah, saying, Jehovah shall be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed, for ever. And he arose and departed: and Jonathan went into the city.

II Samuel 1:25. How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! Jonathan is slain upon thy high places.

26. I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan:
Very pleasant hast thou been unto me:

Thy love to me was wonderful,
Passing the love of women.

27. How are the mighty fallen,
And the weapons of war perished!

GOLDEN TEXT.—He that maketh many friends doeth it to his own destruction;
But there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.—Proverbs 18:24.

LESSON GOAL.—To be able to discover and learn to appreciate the qualities of true friendship.

LESSON PLAN

I. A FRIENDSHIP FORMED. (I Sam. 18:1-4; 19:1-7.)

1. What Is Back of It.
2. What It Will Do.

II. A FRIENDSHIP ENDANGERED. (I Sam. 20:1-42.)

1. Renewing the Covenant.
2. Righteous Anger.
3. An Affectionate Farewell.

III. FRIENDSHIP CELEBRATED IN SONG. (II Sam. 1:17-27.)

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

Verse 4: *Of the robe.*—The three articles of apparel frequently mentioned in the Scriptures are the tunic, the robe and the mantle. Of these only the first and the third were worn by the masses of people, the robe being used only by people of rank.

Verse 4: *And to his girdle.*—Girdles are worn by both rich and poor. While the peasant class wore girdles made of leather, the rich used fine linen, or even silken ones. Some were highly ornamented, being embroidered in gold and studded with gems.

The girdle was intended for use as well as beauty since it served as a deep and safe pocket.

20: 41: *Fell on his face to the ground.* — In Eastern lands prostrating the body before a man of rank continues to be the usual mark of respect, especially in the presence of a king or prince. In the presence of the great and noble they perhaps bow very low, kissing the hem of their garment and placing it to their forehead.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

A week ago our attention was directed to the weaknesses of King Saul which led to his downfall. We saw how the sun set in gloom over his reign. Though beautiful and commanding in person, and rich in the talents which win popular favor, he failed to rule his kingdom wisely and well because he was not able to rule his own spirit.

"He was preeminently marked by the great defects of the Hebrew character generally,—impulsiveness and self-will. As long as he was forming his position, or acquiring influence in the community, he kept his heart in subjection, and acted with modesty and propriety. But when his power was firmly established, he placed no check on his impulsive and wayward nature. His desires at last acquired a frightful, tyrannical influence, that nothing could subdue. The laws of God and the rights of man were alike disregarded in the wild excitement of his self-will. Even his self-respect was completely set at naught, when he applied for counsel to a member of a class which he had tried to exterminate as a nuisance. Occasionally he was visited by impulses of a generous kind, but they were not to be relied on. As he systematically resisted the Spirit of God, he was at length left to the fruit of his own ways, and his death exemplified frightfully the misery of such a situation. The generous, noble, self-denying character of his son, Jonathan, the friend of David, one of the most beautiful in all Bible history, forms a fine contrast to the selfish impulsiveness of the later years of Saul."—*Bible History by Blaikie.*

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

A FRIENDSHIP FORMED

I Sam. 18:1-4 19:1-7. Let it be remarked at the outset that while the coming of David into Saul's life was attended with certain beneficial results to the king, and was fraught with tremendous possibilities for good, nevertheless as it worked itself out it jeopardized certain interests of the kingdom. We are far from saying that any other scheme would have worked out better, for Saul would have been Saul under any circumstances.

The beginning of the king's jealousy toward the youth David may be dated from the time the latter met the giant Philistine, Goliath, on the

field of battle and defeated him. His prowess on that occasion surpassed anything Israel had ever known before; and while the rank and file of the people were joyous over the event which brought them temporary freedom at least from a persistent and dangerous enemy, Saul was not man enough to look at it that way. He was jealous of David and did not take pains to conceal it. Additional exploits of the youth only served to intensify the jealous temper of the king.

But while Saul was nursing bitterness in his soul against David, Jonathan, the king's son, was finding himself drawn more and more toward the open-faced and heroic son of Jesse. Doubtless the hostile attitude the king took forced Jonathan into that friendship which was not to end until death carried him out of the world. He was too manly to be jealous. He could appreciate goodness and strength wherever he saw it. As a pledge and token of this friendship he gave David his robe or cloak, a rich garment worn by him as prince, and his armor also, including sword, bow and girdle.

From this time forward Jonathan stood between his father and David, attempting to quiet the unrighteous wrath of the former, and to save the life of the latter. His was no easy task, for his father was unreasonable, and at times irresponsible. We can imagine his feeling when his father requested him and all the servants of the royal household to go in search of David for the purpose of slaying him. From that time forward Saul began a campaign of vilification and attempted murder that scarcely has a parallel in all the Scriptures. It is not to be wondered at that Jonathan clung all the more loyally and affectionately to David, the object of Saul's concentrated wrath, and sought to save him.

A FRIENDSHIP ENDANGERED

20:1-42. David is to be excused for pouring out his soul to Jonathan in complaint against the manner of Saul's treatment of him. He knew if there was one person in all the world who could understand and sympathize with him it was his closest friend. And so he cried out in agony of soul to Jonathan, "What have I done? what is mine iniquity? and what is my sin before thy father, that he seeketh my life?" Jonathan comforted him, assuring him that he was in no great danger; for, said he, "My father doeth nothing either great or small, but that he discloseth it unto me." That gave him the chance of revealing any evil plot before it could be carried into effect. And yet David was conscious of the fact that there was only a step between him and death.

The two men walked out into the field to hold converse together and to renew the covenant between them, calling upon God to witness what they had done. Jonathan promised to listen to what his father had to say and to observe his conduct, and if he showed continued anger he would apprise David of the danger that threatened so that he might betake himself to some place of safety. Jonathan took the usual oath, imploring God to take his life if he failed to carry out to the letter

the solemn promise he had made; and further, he appealed to David also to remember to show lovingkindness to him during his lifetime and to his descendants after his death. With all the longing of a heart hungry for friendship he requested David to pledge his love to him again.

There were times when David was expected to sit at meat in the house of King Saul. One of them was at the return of the full moon. But David knew of the danger a visit at this time would incur, and so he asked Jonathan to have him excused if Saul should ask why he was absent, the excuse being that David desired to go to Bethlehem for the yearly sacrifice of the family.

The feast was prepared in the royal house and Saul, according to expectation, did ask his son as to the whereabouts of David. Jonathan made the excuse that had been agreed upon, and instantly Saul flew into a rage, not against David alone, but against Jonathan also. For he knew that this friendship meant that no descendant of his would succeed him on the throne. He blamed Jonathan for the dissolution of the royal house and the termination of its place of power. Suiting the action to the word he seized a spear and cast it at his son with deliberate intent to kill. Jonathan arose from the table, stirred with righteous anger, and left the house. It required no further evidence to reveal the spirit that had taken possession of the king.

Jonathan went out to the field, as he had promised David he would do, and by means of the shooting of arrows made known to him the dangerous mood in which he found his father. David did not know how to express fully his gratitude to Jonathan; he fell on his knees and bowed his face three times to the ground. Embracing each other affectionately they parted, Jonathan returning to the city, while David went a different way, seeking his own safety.

FRIENDSHIP CELEBRATED IN SONG

II Sam. 1:17-27. Years passed and Saul continued his search for the life of David. The one passion of his heart was to get rid of this young rival to the throne. His efforts were as futile as they were shameless. Failing to appreciate the spiritual mission of his people he lost their respect, the aid that Samuel could have given him, and the presence of God.

The day of the ill-fated battle arrived. Saul and his three sons were slain. An Amalekite hastened to bring David word, thinking the latter would be pleased that his enemy and rival had been removed and all danger past. But David saw what this calamity would mean to the nation. With high regard for the king, not all of whose acts he could approve, and with nothing but admiration for the king's son whose love to him had been greater than the love of women, he composed a funeral song, or dirge, that stands as one of the most beautiful and expressive in all literature. The stature of the author may be judged by these stanzas.

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

A NOBLE FRIENDSHIP

We are asked to consider this lesson under the title of "A Noble Friendship." And I am sure we are happy to do so. Friendships of the noble and lasting kind are not any more numerous than they ought to be. We will all agree that there are few things in the world more beautiful than true friendships. We love to see them. They exemplify the finer side of human nature. The one that came to exist between David and Jonathan has been chosen as almost ideal. There are others: Daniel and his friends, Paul and Timothy, Damon and Pythias, Luther and Melancthon, Tennyson and Hallam, Miles Standish and Edward Winslow, and, chief of all, Jesus and His disciples.

THE ORIGIN OF FRIENDSHIP

"Friends are born, not made. At least it is so with the higher sort. The marriage of souls is a heavenly mystery, which we cannot explain, and which we need not try to explain. . . . Some friendships grow, and ripen slowly and steadily with the years. We cannot tell when they began, or how. They have become part of our lives, and we just accept them with sweet content and glad confidence. We have discovered that somehow we are rested and inspired by a certain companionship; that we understand and are understood easily."—*Hugh Black*.

THE COST OF FRIENDSHIP

What did it cost Jonathan? It cost him loyalty to his father. Who can tell what that meant to a youth of his noble nature? Jewish boys were taught to honor, love and respect their parents. Jonathan gladly would have done it had it been possible. But he could not be blind to the unreasonable spirit of his father. He could not help protesting against that which was wrong even in one so near to him. He could not have approved his acts without betraying his sense of right.

But it cost him more than that. He was the son of the king. That meant he was the rightful heir to the throne. We could excuse him for wanting to follow Saul, and for using honest endeavors to keep the way clear. But he seemed to know that it was God's will that David should take precedence to him, and that was all right. So far as we can see he never turned a finger to ascend the throne himself. And yet he had those qualities which to the outward eye would have made him a worthy king.

FRIENDSHIPS MADE IN FIRES

It is out of cruel fires such as blaze and crackle in this lesson that lasting friendships are often born. One thing that adds to the whiteness of the lives of David and Jonathan is the repellant background furnished by Saul's frenzy of madness and murder. Right within the chapters that narrate the insane doings of the king is recited the sweet

story of the annealing of two choice spirits. Life has this compensation, that where there are Sauls with green-eyed jealousy, there are Davids and Jonathans whose love surpasses the love of women. Find the choice friendships and likely as not you will also find nearby a tragedy that gave them birth.

THE MARKS OF A FRIEND

1. He is unselfish. He lives for others and finds delight in it. His friendship is not a species of commercialism. 2. He is constant in his friendship. In cloud or sunshine, through evil or good report, he can be depended on. 3. He gives time to his friends. Friendships, like machines, must be kept in repair. They need time, thought, sympathy. Neither plants nor friends grow well without cultivation. 4. He loves fervently. "Jonathan's was no calm, placid, intellectual regard. It took hold of his very heartstrings." 5. He is true to his covenant. A solemn contract is no mere scrap of paper with him. He will be faithful if it takes him through fire and flood. 6. He is on the lookout for the good. He is no fault-finder. If there is grace or goodness he sees it. 7. He opens his heart to his friend. While in his presence he cannot keep his thoughts and feelings hermetically sealed. 8. He administers reproof. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend" (Prov. 27:6). We would lose respect for him if he only laughed at our weakness and never helped us to overcome. See how all these marks found their perfection in Jesus.

THE NATURAL HEART CRAVES A FRIEND

"Love me too." The speaker was a dark-haired maiden, and her big brown eyes were welling up with tears. She was one of the deserted child-wives of India's shadowed households. As she was lame and helpless from a diseased knee joint, and useless as a slave to him, her husband had turned her out upon the roadside to die. The pitiable, little, crouching figure drew the attention of a police officer, who brought her to the nearest Christian mission hospital, where now she was being tenderly nursed back to health. It was the hour of evening prayer, and the doctor had lifted upon her knee the baby of the ward, also a deserted girl. The little child-wife hungrily watched the gentle caresses of the white hand on the wee brown head that nestled confidently on the missionary's shoulder, and slipping off the hospital bed she crept up to the pair. Taking the good doctor's hand in hers, she laid it on her own bare head, and uttered the wistful cry, "Love me too."—*Irene Barnes*.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

What had been the occupation of Amos? Who was the king of Judah when he began to prophesy? Of Israel? What charge was brought against him by the priest of Bethel? What did Amos mean when he said that he was neither the prophet nor the son of a prophet? What were some of the sins of the people against which he was commanded to utter his words of condemnation? Did the prophet feel that it was possible for him to withhold his burning messages?

AMOS: A HERDSMAN CALLED OF GOD TO BE A PROPHET

Lesson **IX**
August 31

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LESSON TEXT: The Book of Amos. (Print 1:1; 7:10-15; 2:11, 12; 3:7, 8.)
(American Standard Revision Text)

1:1. The words of Amos, who was among the herdsmen of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel, two years before the earthquake.

7:10. Then Amaziah the priest of Beth-el sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel: the land is not able to bear all his words.

11. For thus Amos saith, Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall surely be led away captive out of his land.

12. Also Amaziah said unto Amos, O thou seer, go, flee thou away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there:

13. but prophesy not again any more

at Beth-el; for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a royal house.

14. Then answered Amos, and said to Amaziah, I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore-trees:

15. and Jehovah took me from following the flock, and Jehovah said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel.

2:11. And I raised up of your sons for prophets, and of your young men for Nazirites. Is it not even thus, O ye children of Israel? saith Jehovah.

12. But ye gave the Nazirites wine to drink, and commanded the prophets, saying, Prophesy not.

3:7. Surely the Lord Jehovah will do nothing, except he reveal his secret unto his servants the prophets.

8. the lion hath roared; who will not fear? The Lord Jehovah hath spoken; who can but prophesy?

GOLDEN TEXT.—I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then I said, Here am I; send me.—Isaiah 6:8.

LESSON GOAL.—To lead the pupils to see the need of maintaining righteousness as over against the prevailing evils of the day, and to be willing to be faithful witnesses to the truth.

LESSON PLAN

- I. THE VISION OF AMOS. (1:1.)
- II. THE PROTEST AGAINST HIM. (7:10-13.)
- III. HIS DIVINE CALL. (7:14, 15.)
- IV. HE DENOUNCES SELF-INDULGENCE. (2:11, 12.)
- V. JUDGMENT IS NEAR. (3:7, 8.)

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

7:14: *And a dresser of sycamore trees.* — The sycamore or sycamore is a species of fig with a leaf resembling that of the mulberry, the Greek word meaning fig-mulberry. The fruit, which grows on small, leafless twigs near the trunk, is in clusters like grapes. While the figs are insipid in flavor they constitute an important article of food for the very poor.

The light and porous wood is very durable, having been used not only for furniture but also for mummy cases, thousands of years ago.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

Amos was one of the earliest, if not the earliest, of the writing prophets. He belonged to the southern kingdom, but he prophesied in the northern kingdom. He was raised up of God to help to stem the tide of moral and spiritual corrup-

tion that was sweeping over the nation. The incidents attending his call are not set forth as explicitly as in the cases of Isaiah and Jeremiah; though there are intimations through the book which leave no doubt in his mind that he was furnished with all the credentials necessary to his entering without any hesitation upon the work of the prophetic office.

He uttered his prophecy in one of the most prosperous and at the same time one of the most wicked periods of the history of Israel. Jereboam II was king, and he had succeeded in leading his armies to unusual victories. In a sense the people over whom he ruled were unified, and yet there were clashing parties, represented by the high and the low, the rich and the poor. The upper class was far removed from the lower class. The nation, despite its outward marks of unprecedented prosperity, was headed for disaster.

The capital of the ten tribes was Samaria, which was located on an eminence usually called the mountain of Samaria. It was greatly enriched by Jereboam II, after he had brought his kingdom from a state of depression in which he found it to one of strength and prominence among the nations round about. He was able to recover all the territory that had been lost under the rule of his predecessors, to extend the boundaries of Israel, and to bring about a general industrial revival.

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

THE VISION OF AMOS

1:1. The expression "The words of Amos" is unusual in form. At the head of most of the prophecies the introduction reads, "The word of Jehovah." Let us hasten to say that the difference is only in form. The words of Amos are just as much the words of Jehovah as where it is so stated.

We learn that Amos was a herdsman, living at Tekoa, a town about six miles south of Bethlehem. The country of that region abounded in flocks, the soil not being suitable for the growing of grain. The sheep he grew were of a special species called *nakad*. They were "small and stunted in growth, with short legs and ill-formed face, but esteemed on account of their choice wool."

We learn further that he prophesied when Uzziah was king of Judah, and Jereboam, the son of Joash, was king of Israel. Uzziah's rule extended approximately from 790-737 B. C., and Jereboam's from 782-741. These dates make it comparatively easy for us to tell within what period of time Amos preached the word of the Lord. It could not have been before 790, nor later than 741 B. C. But we are forced to place his work in the latter part of this period, for the luxury and wickedness of the reign of Jereboam II was manifest, and we know they came as the result of prosperity which did not exist when he ascended the throne. Notice that what Amos saw had to do with Israel.

THE PROTEST AGAINST HIM

7:10-13. Amos at this time was at Bethel. He had denounced the wickedness of the people of Israel, especially the sanctuaries of the nation and the royal house of its king Jereboam. The Israelites like a wall were crooked and out of line; they did not walk straight and came under the condemnation of the Lord. Amaziah, perhaps the chief priest at the shrine at Bethel, heard the words the prophet had spoken and carried them to the king, saying that if such a man were

permitted to continue his work the effect would be the forming of a conspiracy among the people against the royal house. Amos himself was not at the heart of any such conspiracy; but one can see how the public denunciation of a government may in the course of time create a strong anti-government party. Amaziah felt that the nation could not tolerate this man.

In verse 9 we have what Amos said. His words were serious enough; but when they got into the mouth of Amaziah they were made stronger and more denunciatory, possibly with the intention of creating a greater resentment on the part of the king and bringing him to the place where he would act. But there is no hint as to the effect they had on him. Did he pay no attention to them? Or was his reply too mild to suit the priest? In any event Amaziah resorted to an appeal to Amos to leave the land where he was not welcome, and go back to his own country, Judah, where he could prophesy to his heart's content. He was *persona non grata* in Israel, and his room more desired than his presence. Furthermore it seems to have been the thought of the priest that Amos was one of the men who prophesied for a reward; therefore he urged him to return to his home and make his money and eat his bread there. If Israel needed prophets they would be found elsewhere.

HIS DIVINE CALL

Amos gave Amaziah to understand that he was not a professional prophet. He did not belong to the order of prophets by training. He had never attended one of their schools. And his words seem to imply he was not the son of a prophet. If the professionalizing of the office made any of these men mercenary he was clear of any such charge. He had not chosen the office; instead God had called him to it, and while he was busy following his humble occupation. He had not appeared in Israel of his own will; God had sent him, saying, "Go, prophesy unto my people Israel." Had he not been specially summoned to carry the message to Israel he would have continued to follow the flocks and cultivate the fig-mulberry trees.

SELF-INDULGENCE DENOUNCED

2:11, 12. The outstanding accusation God brought against His people was that they abused His manifold blessings. He had singled them out from among all the nations of the earth and showed them favors of which no other nation could boast. But they acted as though He had done nothing special for them, and therefore as though they owed Him nothing.

One of the favors He had bestowed upon Israel was in raising up prophets and Nazirites who were to be the religious and moral leaders of the people. It was through them that He expected to keep before the mind of all the existence and the providence of God. A distinction to be made between the two groups of leaders is to be found here: the prophets taught largely by word of mouth, while the Nazirites taught

largely by example. The unspiritual tone so prevalent throughout the nation was to be seen in the inability of the people to discover in these religious leaders messengers sent direct from God. Therefore their effort to persuade the Nazirites (part of whose vow was to drink no wine) to become drunken, and to frighten into silence the prophets who were to speak God's truth, constituted a sin of the grossest character. They not only attempted to pervert justice, they also attempted to close the lips of God's spokesmen and to destroy the primary source of the knowledge and will of Jehovah.

JUDGMENT NEAR

3:7, 8. Amos aimed to impress upon Israel the nearness of divine judgment. Every effect has a cause; the sin of Israel in so far neglecting its responsibility would bring about consequences not to its liking. The course the nation had deliberately chosen could not help leading to doom, even though there should prevail a sense of security.

"The lion roars from his den because he has captured his prey. The bird has fallen because the snare has caught it. The tocsin is sounded in the city because there is reason for alarm. So likewise disaster falls upon a people because Jehovah has sent it."

But what is God's method? He reveals His purpose to His prophets before He brings it to pass. So close do they stand to Him that they are admitted to the secrets of His will. More than that, He will not send judgment upon His people unless He gives them notice in advance. If the wrath of God should fall upon the ten tribes they could not say they had not been warned of its approach. The lion roars as he is about to spring upon his prey. There was to be a sending forth of the message as to the purpose of the Lord before the punishment came.

"But," said the prophet, "the lion hath roared." He meant he was already upon his prey. And so was judgment near, for God's voice had sounded forth. His prophets had spoken. They could not keep silent, for they were under the urge of His Spirit. It was time for the people to hear and tremble. The premonition had for its primary aim the bringing of the people to an acknowledgment and confession of their sin; but failure to repent would most certainly bring swift judgment.

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

THE UNDERLYING SINS

There must have been something terribly wrong with Israel that God would summon Amos from following the flock and send him to the capital of a nation to denounce it. What was wrong? We shall let another tell us:

"Let us turn to the pages of Amos, and note what he saw beneath the apparent prosperity and external splendor of Jereboam's reign. The luxury of the rich was conspicuous. They had their winter and summer residences (3:15), which were built of hewn stone, panelled with ivory, and furnished with couches inlaid with the same costly material (5:1; 3:15; 6:4), where they feasted and drank to excess amid delicate

perfumes, and soft strains of varied music (6: 4-6). But these luxuries were obtained by means which Amos bluntly calls *violence and robbery* (3:10); by oppression of the poor and needy, who were even sold as slaves by their remorseless creditors (2: 6-8); by dishonest trading, by false weights, and worthless goods (8: 4-6); by exacting presents and taking bribes (5:11, 12). Women showed themselves as cruel and hard-hearted as men, imperiously demanding from their husbands the means for the supply of their luxuries, regardless of the fact that they were to be procured at the expense of the poor and needy (4:1).—*The Doctrine of the Prophets by A. F. Kirkpatrick.*

DISCERNING SIN

Amos was born and grew up in those rural and pastoral regions to the south of Jerusalem where the old homely virtues seem to have been taught and practiced in a manner that may be said to have bordered on hilarity. He believed that God is a moral being, holy and righteous, and that He governs and is guided by ethical principles. With that conception of the moral nature of God, it was not possible for him to pass by sin without seeing it and rebelling against it. What he saw as he tended the markets of Samaria with his produce made him feel that the holiness of God was not manifesting itself in His people. That very condition constituted the background of his call. We are not likely to protest against the unholy nature of man unless we have seen the holy nature of God.

MANIFOLD EVILS

Why is it that in so many cases we lift up our voices against one sin and pass by another? It requires no argument to prove that this is the case. What has our training to do with it? Are we or are we not more disposed to see the faults of our friends than the faults of those who are not our friends? Some persons cry out against intemperance, but say nothing against dishonesty; they denounce gossip, but are silent about profanity; they would vote against the wide-open Sabbath, but they would not lift their finger against the oppression of the poor. How do you account for this? Are we likely to hate the sins more which have harmed us or our friends? The soul of Amos seemed to rebel against sin in all its forms. Should that be a normal state with all of us?

DENOUNCING THE PROPHET

Amos was not popular, especially among those whom he threatened with the judgment of God. He held up the law of the Lord and compelled the people to see themselves in it, and they did not like what they saw. They told him to get out of their country; they did not need the message he imagined God sent him to deliver; they had gotten along before he came and they could after he had gone. Well, times have not changed. People never have liked to be stirred out of their lethargy and sinful luxury. They would rather be let alone. If they are flattered

they are pleased; if they are soundly condemned for their sins they are displeased. The Church is denounced today, together with its ministry, more because it exposes sins than for any other single reason.

THE MAN FROM THE RANKS

There will probably always be a place for the man who comes right up out of the ranks, without the cultural advantages the schools may offer. That is not to the discredit of the schools; rather is it to their credit, because such men are few. But there are men in practically every walk of life who have taken the short cut, and yet they have added glory to their profession. God fits them for their calling without that training by human hands which most of us require. He is free to make exceptions to His rule.

THE OLD FASHIONED VIRTUES

Amos called the people of his day back to the practice of the old substantial virtues, such as truth, honesty, integrity, humility, sobriety, equality, justice, purity. He believed that these are worth more to a nation than all the material wealth in the world. There is something to be esteemed above the scales on which we weigh gold or bales of hay; something more to be desired than the outward marks of an earthly prosperity. Amos knew this, and he aimed to get others to think as he did.

THE POWER OF WEALTH TO DESTROY THE BEST

"One day last winter (1907) a wealthy woman spent forty thousand dollars on a dinner in one of the swell hotels up town. While the doings were going on inside, a policeman outside was approached by a thinly clad woman with a baby in her arms, who asked him for help. The big cop looked at her baby and said in his gruff voice: 'Why, your baby is dead.' With a shriek the woman collapsed. The policeman sent her and her dead baby to the station house in the patrol wagon. The baby had starved to death." The selfish and extravagant use of money is causing that picture to be repeated in many places. Men and women spend their money extravagantly for pleasure while, not far from them, are families in destitute circumstances. Plenty of money for automobiles, fine clothing, travel, and pleasure; but only a pittance for missions, while the heathen are dying by the millions without the gospel of Christ. But we do not have to be rich to be transgressors along this line. There are many in moderate circumstances who live beyond their means to gratify their love for pleasure and cry poverty when the Church makes a demand upon them."—*Sunday School Magazine*.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

What may be said to have been the most important event in the reign of good King Josiah? How did the book of the law come to be lost? Who found it? Under what circumstances? Why did it have such an effect on the king when it was read to him? What steps did he take to bring its message to bear upon the heart of the entire nation? It led to the making of what covenant? What feast was observed? In what sense may we say that God's word is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path?

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LESSON TEXT: II Kings 22:1—23:3, 21-25; II Chronicles 34:1—35:27. (Print II Kings 22:1, 2, 8; 23:1-3, 21-25.)

(American Standard Revision Text)

22:1. Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign; and he reigned thirty and one years in Jerusalem: and his mother's name was Jedidah the daughter of Adaiah of Bozkath.

2. And he did that which was right in the eyes of Jehovah, and walked in all the way of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left.

8. And Hilkiyah the high priest said unto Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of Jehovah. And Hilkiyah delivered the book to Shaphan, and he read it.

23:1. And the king sent, and they gathered unto him all the elders of Judah and of Jerusalem.

2. And the king went up to the house of Jehovah, and all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the people, both small and great: and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of Jehovah.

3. And the king stood by the pillar, and made a covenant before Jehovah, to walk after Jehovah, and to keep his commandments, and his testimonies, and

his statutes, with all his heart, and all his soul, to confirm the words of this covenant that were written in this book: and all the people stood to the covenant.

21. And the king commanded all the people, saying, Keep the passover unto Jehovah your God, as it is written in this book of the covenant.

22. Surely there was not kept such a passover from the days of the judges that judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah;

23. but in the eighteenth year of king Josiah was this passover kept to Jehovah in Jerusalem.

24. Moreover them that had familiar spirits, and the wizards, and the teraphim, and the idols, and all the abominations that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, did Josiah put away, that he might confirm the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiyah the priest found in the house of Jehovah.

25. And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to Jehovah with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, And a light unto my path.—Psalm 119:105.

LESSON GOAL.—To show that a God-revering ruler influences his people to worship and serve God.

LESSON PLAN

I. JOSIAH LEARNS GOD'S WORD. (II Kings 22:1-20; II Chron. 34:1-28.)

1. A Name for Goodness.

2. Repairing God's House.

3. Seeking to Know God's Word.

II. JOSIAH READS GOD'S WORD TO JUDAH. (II Kings 23:1-3; II Chron. 34:29-33.)

III. JOSIAH RENEWS THE PASSOVER. (II Kings 23:21-25; II Chron. 35:1-19.)

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

Verse 8: *Scribe . . . book of the law.*—The scribe was a student of the law, able to read it and understand its meaning. He was usually better qualified to handle the law than was the priest. It may be that

Hilkiah could not read the law; he certainly needed to have Shaphan interpret it. The scribes knew the value of the law better than did the priests.

The book that was found was a scroll containing a part of the Pentateuch, probably the portion of Deuteronomy in which the regulations are given which led to the different reforms Josiah instigated.

23:22: *Such a passover*.—The law of the passover is found in Deut. 16: 5. It had formerly been customary to observe the feast as a household matter anywhere throughout the country. The passover had not been observed for a long time. The reference in this verse is to the first order ever given, obliging the assembling of the people at Jerusalem for the passover celebration.

Verse 24: *Wizards and the teraphim*.—A wizard was “a professed possessor of supernatural knowledge, derived in the form of wizardry referred to in the Bible, from the pretended ability to converse with the spirits of the dead.” Wizards were punished by death (Lev. 22: 27). It was this law Josiah put into force. Teraphim were images of household deities; they were consulted for advice and were probably regarded as bringers of good luck.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

Josiah came to the throne of Judah at the age of eight. It seems that he was under the teaching of Hilkiah. When sixteen he began to be active in leading the people in the way of God. His good intentions were helped by the prophets Zephaniah, Jeremiah and Nahum. He took interest in the repairing of the temple, giving orders that the money gathered should be put to use according to the custom started by King Joash. The discovery of the scroll of the law gave him a basis for further reforms. He took active part in demolishing idols and altars, not only in Judah, but in other places. He called the people to Jerusalem for the renewal of the celebration of the passover. He toured the kingdom in the interests of pure worship.

Assyrian power was declining; this encouraged Josiah in his far-reaching reforms. “Certainly it is not by accident that his narrator boasts that no king before him or after him had been so devoted to God and faithful to the law as was Josiah. . . . Josiah’s ideal was to be a second David and, if possible, to exceed the first one.”

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

An outstanding good king over Judah was Hezekiah. Success seemed to turn his head and he allowed the strong religious character of the nation to deteriorate. His son was Manasseh, who began to reign at the age of twelve, too young and too weak and too limited in discrimination to choose the path of a good king. He became an instigator of iniquity and supplanted the evidences of true religion with all forms of idolatry. It is a shocking record that is preserved of him. When suffering for his evils he repented and tried to remedy the bad state he had allowed, but with little far-reaching influence. His son Amon ruled for two years with a black record of iniquity, trespassing more and more. It was to such a kingdom that Josiah came as king when but eight years old.

JOSIAH LEARNS GOD'S WORD (II Kings 22:1-20; II Chron. 34:1-28)

Josiah's reign was for thirty-one years. During his early years he was directed by his mother or officials. Influences of his great grandfather's reforms must have held over to Josiah's day. When sixteen he began to seek after the God of David; at twenty he started the destruction of idolatry throughout the realm; at twenty-six he pushed the repairs of the temple, knowing that this was essential for the pure worship of Jehovah. (He did more than destroy the evil; he put opportunities for the good in its place.)

The records give Josiah *a name for goodness*; this he deserved, for "he left the brightest name for piety and religious zeal among all the successors of David." He was a stickler for personal righteousness, staying in the straight path of the religion of Hezekiah and David. He was approved by the people and by God. His *repairing God's house* was a climax in his procedure. His zeal was more than destructive iconoclasm; he aimed at establishing the temple instead of shrines to false gods and at reviving true worship instead of the wild orgies of pagan practices. It was while the repairing of the temple went on that a copy of the book of the law was discovered in the temple, and this discovery brought to him the authoritative Word of God to strengthen his purpose and to direct his reforms.

It was not enough to have the words of the law read to him; he wanted its meaning interpreted. His zeal in *seeking to know God's Word* was rewarded. Added to what Shaphan told him was the message from the prophetess, Huldah. She declared that all the punishment for sins would be measured out to the people, but that because of the king's humility before God, his earnest endeavors to save the people from idolatry and his provisions for recognition of the true God, the infliction of the punishment would be delayed until after his death. The effect of this report on Josiah was to arouse him to inform the people about the Word of God, to show them the fate that impended because of their sins and to encourage them to whole-hearted return to the worship of God. His desire was that all the people should have the direct statement from God, in the hope that they would give heed to His warnings and directions.

JOSIAH READS GOD'S WORD TO JUDAH (II Kings 23: 1-3; II Chron. 34: 29-33)

A representative assembly was called for the reading of the newly found law, and the arranging of a covenant between the people and God. It was the king's thought that the people as well as himself should observe the law of God. He dismissed all selfishness from his mind and included all the people in the covenant that was to be made before God. This new covenant was rather a solemn promise on the part of the king and the people, obligating themselves to obedience and service. It was not to be a balanced accounting, in which they would promise certain loyalties on condition that God would promise certain

blessings. Josiah did not think they were in position to dictate any terms to Jehovah; it was for them to present themselves before Him as pledging themselves to worship none but God and to follow His laws. The results were to be left with God.

Josiah was the leader in the reading of the law to the assembly. He took the first steps in the covenant-promise. He set the example for others to follow. There was a response on the part of the people that is commendable. They were willing to stand by the same pledge that their king made. As the years went on the people carried out the requirements of the covenant and as long as the influence and leadership of Josiah remained the people departed not from following the Lord, the God of their fathers. The king established the compulsory worship of Jehovah, but the people manifested a willingness to accede to his authority. This royal reformer set the pace for his subjects. He asked nothing of the people that he was not actually doing. In this way he had their confidence and they obeyed him.

JOSIAH RENEWS THE PASSOVER (II Kings 23:21-25; II Chron. 35:1-19)

The passover was an essential feast in the religion of the Israelites. It had been neglected. Josiah's reformation renewed the observance of the passover according to the direction given in the newly found book of the law. Josiah centralized all worship in Jerusalem and made the temple the central place for the worship. Accordingly he planned the passover in a different fashion from that formerly observed. Instead of its being a household matter, it was to be a national assembly. No time was allowed to elapse, for in the same year that the law was found the passover was observed.

All the prescribed forms were followed. The priests were put in charge of the services. The Levites were told to replace the "holy ark" in its rightful place without procession or ceremony, and to give themselves to rites of purification and the conduct of the passover. (It seems that while the temple was neglected and in decay the ark had been removed from its proper place.) Elaborate gifts were made by the king and the princes and the chief priests, so that three times as many cattle were given as had been presented by Hezekiah. The Levites carried out their orders and rendered the needed service. "Throughout the festival, the continued service of priests, Levites, porters, and orchestra were compulsory." This passover was greater than any since the earliest days of the kingdom.

Josiah was a thoroughgoing reformer. Though king, he considered the details of right religious practices for all the people. He removed the suggestions of former idolatry, so that God's Word might have free course among the people. He did his work so thoroughly and with such splendid results that he is recorded as one of the most zealous of Israel's kings to turn to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might.

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

THE FIRST STEPS TO GREATNESS

Josiah inherited something that laid the foundation for his career; it was his religious nature, a nature that early turned to God. He received proper direction so that as a man and as a king he walked in right paths. He allowed himself to be God's instrument to give Israel another chance to preserve right relations with God.

Greatness of course is a relative term. Men are great in manufacturing, in inventing, in financing, in governing. We are thinking of that all around greatness which includes personal character as well as achievement. We do not care to separate what a man is from what he does. We believe that greatness starts in the home with the pre-natal gifts to the child and that home guidance contributes to greatness.

A GOD-GUIDED YOUTH

No matter how we try we cannot escape the fact that the explanation of Josiah's good record must be found in his youthful training which led him to seek divine direction.

Nothing is more discussed just now than the trend of youth. Complaints are many against them. Predictions of a sad future for them are plentiful. But the youth of today that are attached to the Christian Church are earnestly seeking to be God-guided. They think in religious terms and talk intelligently about religion. They are trying to adapt their experiences and their knowledge and their religious training to one another. They are having a hard struggle but many of them are getting into the ranks of satisfied, convinced, intensified Christians.

MAKING GOD'S WORD KNOWN

Josiah was a missionary. He took what he received and passed it on to others. He learned the good that God's Word was to him and he laid plans for sharing that good with his people. He realized that the strength and stay of his nation must come from God and that a realization of this fact must be given to the people from the Word of God.

This practice of Josiah is a good starting point for the discussion of the Christian's obligation to inform others about God. The whole plan of religious education may be considered; what the local church is doing could be outlined. The missionary organizations, the methods of operations and the present results might be considered. Just what share each can have in making God's Word known to the family, to the neighbors, to the foreigners and to the world might be suggested.

A ROYAL RELIGIOUS EXAMPLE

Josiah led as well as commanded. He went ahead and called the people to follow him. He set the example to his people of a worshiper of Jehovah. His position as king did not make him hesitate. His influence was enhanced because of his royalty. Like king like people in matters of religion!

Fortunate indeed have we of America and England been in our highest leadership in government so far as religious practices go. Our presidents and kings have been acquainted with God's Word, members of the Christian Church, unashamed of being known as subjects of Jesus Christ. It should not be forgotten when we laud our rulers that in doing so we are acknowledging their allegiance to God. It will be a sad day for our nations when we are under the rule of men who ignore God and despise the Church and have no place in their lives for religion. We who are Christians should guard zealously our prerogatives as a Christian people to demand Christian rulers.

REMOVING EVIL SUGGESTIONS

Johnny was warned against the dangers of fire. He had been told that matches were unsafe things for a boy to handle. He must never under any circumstances carry a match in his pocket. The boy was convinced and promised that he would never touch a match except for just reasons. But this is what happened. He was sent to a neighbor to borrow matches. (The house supply was exhausted and the home was in the country, miles from the store.) He enjoyed the trip and carefully stored the well-protected matches in his pocket. But the temptation was too great. There were so many matches that a few would not be missed. He would hide behind the wheat stack and crack one or two of the matches between stones. But the burning head of the hammered match flew into the straw and a costly fire followed.

Josiah took a wiser course. He not only warned against idolatry; he also destroyed the idols. He took away every suggestion of evil.

MAKING WORSHIP SUPREME

Josiah did more than denounce and destroy idols. He gave his people the worship of God in its truest, purest form that he knew. He followed the directions in God's Word. He renewed the passover. He made the people understand that their supreme privilege was the worshiping of God in the right way.

Worship is our privilege. Apparently idolatry, in the pagan sense, is no problem for us. The opportunities for making worship to God accord with His instructions are open for all of us. It is a fact undeniable that when God is worshiped truly the people live peaceably and magnanimously. The centering of the heart's desires on praise to God, instruction from Him, petition to Him and service for Him tends to destroy selfishness and quicken the sense of sane altruism. So we teach children to worship at home and at school and in church. We provide for and practice worship. However, we have not yet made worship supreme.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

Who was Jeremiah? Gather the facts about his life and work. How was he called by God? Why did he delay his answer? What was the state of Judah? How did Jeremiah try to help his people? Why did he stress individual religion?

JEREMIAH: THE PROPHET OF INDIVIDUAL RELIGION

Lesson XI
September 14

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LESSON TEXT: Jeremiah 1: 1-10; 14: 7-22; 31: 27-34. (Print 1: 4-10; 31: 27-34.)
(American Standard Revision Text)

1: 4. Now the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying,

5. Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee, and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee; I have appointed thee a prophet unto the nations.

6. Then said I, Ah, Lord Jehovah! behold, I know not how to speak; for I am a child.

7. But Jehovah said unto me, Say not, I am a child; for to whomsoever I shall send thee thou shalt go, and whatsoever I shall command thee thou shalt speak.

8. Be not afraid because of them; for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith Jehovah.

9. Then Jehovah put forth his hand, and touched my mouth; and Jehovah said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth:

10. see, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down and to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.

31: 27. Behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man, and with the seed of beast.

28. And it shall come to pass that, like as I have watched over them to pluck up and to break down and to overthrow and to destroy and to afflict,

GOLDEN TEXT.—Each one of us shall give account of himself to God.—Rom. 14: 12.

LESSON GOAL.—To teach that in all matters moral and religious there is individual responsibility before God.

LESSON PLAN

- I. JEREMIAH'S CALL AND COMMISSION. (1: 1-10.)
- II. PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY BEFORE GOD. (14: 7-22.)
- III. INDIVIDUAL RELATION TO GOD. (31: 27-34)

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

Verse 6: *I cannot speak: for I am a child.*—This must not be taken literally. Jeremiah made use of a common expression of his day to indicate humility and hesitancy before a superior. The word "child" had a broader meaning for the Hebrews than for us; here it signified being "too young." Jeremiah's experience and years make his words to Jehovah an index to his humble, reticent attitude.

31: 29: *Eaten sour grapes . . . teeth are set on edge.*—This was

a proverbial statement in common use; it indicated the false belief that had grown up, contrary to the instruction in Deuteronomy 24:16. It reflected on God's justice in assuming that the innocent suffered for the guilty. The prophet foresaw a change of view and a realization of personal responsibility and suffering for sins.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

In the little town of Anathoth, a few miles north of Jerusalem, Jeremiah was born of priestly lineage. When still a young man he was called to be a prophet. He lived through the declining years of Judah and the fall of Jerusalem. Five kings came and went during his life. Two of these Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin were of small consequence. But during the reigns of Josiah, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, Jeremiah held a place of prominence, though his popularity was at a low ebb much of the time. This was due to his denunciation of the sins of the people and to his advice concerning the relation to other nations. He exposed the folly of false trust, whether in the supposed impregnable position of Jerusalem, the sacredness of the temple, or in other nations. He called for reforms which were not popularly endorsed. He faced death rather than recant his words, which he had spoken under divine guidance. He saw the city overthrown and many taken captive. He was finally taken to Egypt, and a tradition says that he met a martyr's death. In Alexandria his supposed tomb is to be seen.

"No Old Testament character is so intimately known to us as Jeremiah. It is not simply that we are well informed as to many of the outward events of his life. The vital thing for us is that we are taken behind the veil and see revelation at work; we know the inmost thoughts and feelings of a strangely attractive personality."—*Hastings*.

The character of Jeremiah has been treated in "The Greater Men and Women of the Bible" under six traits: his loneliness, his introspection, his despondency, his anger, his sense of destiny and his likeness to Christ.

He confined his activity as a prophet to Jerusalem and its environs, probably not traveling far from its site until after its destruction in the days of Zedekiah.

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

"There is a tragic interest attaching to the life and times of Jeremiah. The circumstances of the age, the person of the prophet, the character of his message, all combine to demand our sympathetic study. . . . The interest in the Book of Jeremiah itself is unique. On the one hand, it is our most reliable and elaborate source for the long period of history which it covers; on the other, it presents us with prophecy in its most intensely human phase, manifesting itself through a strangely attractive personality that was subject to like doubts and passions with ourselves" (*Hastings*).

JEREMIAH'S CALL AND COMMISSION (1:1-10)

The preface to the record of Jeremiah states who he was and what his early training gave him. He was of priestly family, his father being Hilkiyah (not the Hilkiyah who found the book of the law in the temple), who laid the foundation of fitness for prophetic ministrations in his son. The time of his call by Jehovah was the thirteenth year of King Josiah.

The import of the call was to inform him that he was a God-appointed prophet to the nations. He was specially designated for a special task, long before he had shown any particular fitness for it. God had planned for him that he was to become a prophet and had

JEREMIAH: THE PROPHET OF
INDIVIDUAL RELIGION

endowed him with qualities and powers necessary for being a prophet. This exalted standing before God and distinctive honor by God's words to him, would seem enough to cause him to rush forward, eager and glad to engage in God's work. But Jeremiah was overwhelmed by the seriousness of the undertaking and held back, excusing himself by terming himself but a child, unable to speak to the nations as a prophet. There was no deliberate stubbornness, or studied refusal, in his reply to God. It was the true humility which God welcomed. God assured him that he was not alone in facing the work; God was allied with him, had been before Jeremiah was born. He would be given the words to say; he would not be as a child when he spoke to the people but as a mouthpiece of God. He was not to think of fear for he would have God's presence and protection. By symbolical act God showed the young man that he would go forth as God's agent to be the overseer of the nations and kingdoms.

What Jeremiah confronted was a lifetime of hard work. He knew the bad state of his people and was conscious of the certain doom that was ahead of them. He was aware of the probable further deterioration of the moral and religious life among them. It was no easy question for him to decide. He could accept the commission and break forth into a life of dangers and hardships, or he could refuse God's call and follow the easier course of drifting along with the people, letting them sin if they chose, but keeping himself in right relation to God. The decision was to go with God, and accept the consequences.

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY BEFORE GOD (14: 7-22)

Jehovah's patience with Judah was at an end. His long suffering had exhausted itself in trying to bring His people into recognition of Him as supreme and of their responsibility before Him as their chief concern. There was a severe drought, causing intense famine affecting man and beast. This was taken as a direct punishment from Jehovah for the wickedness of the people. There was in consequence a gradual acknowledgment of the need of God to spare them from perishing. They resorted to intercession, carrying a confession and a plea for His presence with them. They asked God not to be like a traveler passing through their land, indifferent to their extremity of suffering, but to remain with them.

This acknowledgment of responsibility before God came too late. They had changed their attitudes too tardily. God was doing with them just as they had been doing with Him. They had given Him but a passing notice as they indulged in their idolatries. Though God is neither vindictive nor retributory He must be just.

Jeremiah's argument with God had no effect. He asked that God be merciful a little longer and excused the people because they had been deluded by false prophets, who had belittled the threatenings of God against their sins. But God denounced these false prophets; they were not of His sending and their words were gathered from lying

visions and divinations. At heart they were deceivers. The people had heeded their words rather than words of God's true prophets, because they wanted to remain in their sins.

The result would be direst suffering and finally utter destruction. There was no suggestion that Jehovah would alter His purpose to punish His people who had spurned their responsibility before Him. Jeremiah's pleadings (19-22) are put in questions. He is at his wit's end to know how to explain God's decisions. But he speaks for the people in acknowledgment of sins present and past and, on the basis of the covenant with them, exalts Jehovah above the heathen deities and throws himself and the people back on the will of God, saying "we will wait upon thee."

INDIVIDUAL RELATION TO GOD (31: 27-34)

The promise of deliverance from captivity and the restoration to Jerusalem called for a prophecy of what would obtain in the future. Jeremiah sets forth the ideal condition, in which the individual would be regarded as the unit and the standing of the nation would be determined by the different individuals in their relation to God. The picture of the repopulated area is given for the encouragement of the captives. Verse twenty-eight is similar to 1:10. What Jeremiah was to do prefigured what Jehovah had done and would do. The days of building and planting were future, following the return from captivity.

The old proverb that told of suffering for the guilt of others was to be changed and each would stand before God to suffer for his own sins. This was a new emphasis on individual responsibility. No longer would it be possible to hide under the good name of a family, but each would have to meet God for himself to answer for wrongs done.

The new covenant was prophesied, not "that it introduces a new moral and religious code, but that it confers a new and inward power of fulfilling the code already given." The old covenant had failed by insisting on external conformity to rules. Under the new covenant God would put into the individual "the eternal principles of religion and morality as the spring of all action." God's law would be in the heart; individual responsibility would be inescapable. Thus there would be an inward knowledge of God and a conviction that He expects more of His people than ceremonialism. His love would provide a way of forgiveness that would meet the needs of the individual.

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

GOD AND THE NEEDED MAN

Jeremiah was the man God needed; he was to be God's prophet. God faced the presentation of vital truths to His people and there must be a man of the people to tell them. God has always been in that relation to His dealings with humanity. Noah was the man God needed and so was Abraham. God needed Joseph and Moses and Isaiah and Paul and Luther and hundreds more whose names belong to the worthies of a great past.

JEREMIAH: THE PROPHET OF INDIVIDUAL RELIGION

Lesson XI
September 14

Picture the world today and consider the men God needs to fill up the quota of workers in His name. Localize the matter and reckon the number of persons God needs to care for your community, your industries, your recreations, your churches. What of the near future in which you will probably be a part? Is God going to need somebody to speak for Him, to be an example of the conduct He wants all men to manifest? Make it even more personal. Might it be that you are the one God will be needing this afternoon and tomorrow to do something for Him?

THE EXALTATION OF PERSONAL VALUE

Much is said today about complexes. Even in common parlance there is reference to inferiority and to superiority complexes. These adorning phrases of ordinary conversation may mean much or nothing. Just now we are thinking about the personal exaltation of Jeremiah. He said he was but a child, disqualified for the work God assigned him. Was he ruled by a feeling of inferiority? Afterward he set forth with all the boldness of a giant to do the work he at first feared. Was he ruled then by a feeling of superiority? To both questions we say, "No." It was sincere humility in the first case and perfect confidence in God in the latter. Jeremiah did reach an exaltation of personal value but it was because he learned to know his value to God, to believe that God could use him. Self-evaluation endeavors to make the best showing possible, but the man who consecrates himself to God's work will rate himself very high, however, not taking credit to himself, but always crediting God for what he has become.

SUBMISSION BASIC TO PROGRESS

Great ships ride the ocean, but in submission to aquatic laws. Airplanes are our latest servants for swift transit, but in submission to aeronautic laws. On the heights of scholarship stand notable men, but their progress was according to the laws of learning. Substantial business organizations stabilize our prosperity, but according to economic laws. Athletes win laurels but under the dominance of the laws for health and training. Institutions start small and grow large, but they follow fixed laws. No matter what kind of progress is considered the fact of submission must be recognized.

God laid down laws for conduct toward Him and toward people and Jeremiah insisted that to these laws there must be perfect submission if there was to be personal or national progress. As Christians there is no escaping submission to God's spiritual laws if we would advance in spiritual life.

THE BETTER TOMORROW

"Have hope. Though clouds environ now,
And gladness hides her face in scorn,
Put thou the shadow from thy brow—
No night but hath its morn."

Jeremiah knew the gloom of his day and predicted the doom for the people in their sins. But he saw beyond where God's promises painted a new landscape and filled it with joyful people. It was toward that better tomorrow that he endeavored to turn their heavy eyes. He coaxed them to look up and see what their coming condition might be, if they would take God's warnings to heart and follow the leadings of His Spirit. It all seems clear to us. We read about his message and wonder that his listeners were dull-eared and blind-eyed.

This hope for a better tomorrow makes daily living tolerable for many a downtrodden life. No one wants to live beneath the level of his highest ambition. It is heeding the lure of what is better further on that gives courage to the student, to the apprentice, to the youth fighting for independence. It is this hope that makes the Christian songful when he labors through his humdrum rounds.

UNSHARED GUILT BEFORE GOD

I and my, me and mine are the words we like to say when we speak of experiences. We use them about our relation to God and find satisfaction in their use. But when sins and their guilt are discussed we prefer the plural pronouns. We do not care to shoulder personal guilt as though the fault were all ours. We are content to distribute the suffering for sins, to have others punished with us, even though the blame is our own. That was the old teaching which Jeremiah repudiated. He was speaking for God and his words made it clear that before God personal guilt must be individually borne.

Many today are trying to delude themselves by assuming that God can be deceived, as people are, about who is blamable for wrongs and crimes and all forms of iniquity. They cleverly slip under cover of a shared guilt before the court of public opinion. The public eye is easily deceived. But before God all is different.

AS THE INDIVIDUAL, SO THE GROUP

To sweep the nation into right relation to God was impracticable, as Jeremiah found. He began to teach the individual relation to God, hoping that thereby, though the process would be slow, the national character would be improved. Jesus exalted the individual by building His Church on the plan of adding each person according to that person's relation to Himself. His was not a mass movement, but a man after man gathering. The Church follows this policy. The name pastor suggests individual care for the members. Our catechetical method singles out the individual for preparation.

How quickly a drop of poison unfits a glass of water for use. How soon a wicked man contaminates the life of his "crowd!" Ought it not also be true that the presence of a Christian Christianizes his group?

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

Read the book of Jonah. Why do you consider it a true story? What was Jonah's reason for despising Nineveh? Was his preaching sincere? Did he want God to destroy its people? Did he yield to God's rebuke of his attitude?

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LESSON TEXT: Jonah 1:1—4:11. (Print 3:1-5, 10; 4:1-11.)

(American Standard Revision Text)

3:1. And the word of Jehovah came unto Jonah the second time, saying,

2. Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.

3. So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of Jehovah. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city, of three days' journey.

4. And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

5. And the people of Nineveh believed God; and they proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.

10. And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil which he said he would do unto them; and he did it not.

4:1. But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry.

2. And he prayed unto Jehovah, and said, I pray thee, O Jehovah, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I hastened to flee unto Tarshish; for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in lovingkindness, and repentest thee of the evil.

3. Therefore now, O Jehovah, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.

4. And Jehovah said, Doest thou well

to be angry?

5. Then Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shade, till he might see what would become of the city.

6. And Jehovah God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to deliver him from his evil case. So Jonah was exceeding glad because of the gourd.

7. But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd, that it withered.

8. And it came to pass, when the sun arose, that God prepared a sultry east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and requested for himself that he might die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live.

9. And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death.

10. And Jehovah said, Thou hast had regard for the gourd, for which thou hast not labored, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night:

11. and should not I have regard for Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?

GOLDEN TEXT: Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to him.—Acts 10:34, 35.

LESSON GOAL.—To show that God's grace is for all men and that Christians should rejoice when others receive His blessings.

LESSON PLAN

I. GOD CALLS JONAH TO PREACH. (3:1-5, 10.)

1. Obedient to God.

2. Effective Preaching.

3. Repentance Rewarded.

II. JONAH COMPLAINS AGAINST GOD. (4:1-5.)

III. GOD CENSURES JONAH'S NARROWNESS. (6-11.)

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

Verse 5: *Sackcloth*.—This was a coarse cloth, of a dark color, usually made of goat's hair. It was called in Hebrew SAK, from which

the English word is derived. It was worn customarily by mourners; often, if not habitually, by prophets and by captives. The garment of sackcloth probably resembled a sack, with openings made for the neck and arms, and slit down the front. It was cast about the loins and girded on, and was usually worn over other raiment but sometimes next to the skin.—*Davis*.

Verses 6-8: *Jehovah God prepared a gourd . . . a worm . . . a sultry east wind*.—This series of special preparations by Jehovah indicates a miraculous use of common things in that country. The gourd was probably the castor-oil plant, sometimes called Palma Christi (Christ's palm). It grows rapidly even in the driest soil and among stones and rubbish; its leaves provide a good shelter from the sun. It reaches a height of eight to ten feet. Pusey says that "on warm days when a small rain falls, black caterpillars are generated in great numbers on this plant, which in one night so suddenly and so often cut off its leaves that bare ribs remain; which I have often observed with much wonder." The sultry, or "glowing hot" wind, blowing from the east over the desert sands, makes the heat unbearable. These hot winds burn up and carry away the verdure of the plains.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

Jonah, the son of Amittai, is identical with the prophet described in II Kings 14: 25. He lived in the reign of Jeroboam II. The book (Jonah) is a narrative of the story of Jonah, which is familiar. In some respects it is the greatest book of the Old Testament, the writer's object being to proclaim the universal character of God's love, and to show that it was not limited to Israel alone, but extended even to the heathen, if they were willing to abandon their evil courses and turn in penitence to Him.—*Alleman*.

The birthplace of Jonah was a few miles north of Nazareth, "He lived, as it were, on the highway of the nations, and the doings of the great world-power at Nineveh would readily reach his ears." Nineveh was situated on the eastern bank of the Tigris. It was the far-famed capital of Assyria. Jonah traveled away from rather than toward Nineveh. He endeavored to get as far from the great city as possible. He went to the seaport, Joppa. There he knew he could get a ship for Tarshish, probably Spain, the most distant point of which he heard travelers speak. Thwarted in his purpose and called a second time by Jehovah, he made his way from some point on the coast of Palestine to Nineveh, a journey of seven or eight hundred miles.

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

The book of Jonah gathers up certain events in the life of the prophet and uses them to set forth the all-embracing grace of Jehovah and to show the obligation of those who know God's love to make it known to others, even to those who are despised and hated. Jonah as a true representative of Israel felt keenly the racial and national prejudice against Nineveh. There was just cause for this animosity, but the teaching of Jonah is that bitter feelings are not to control religious activities. This book introduces the high note of Jesus about loving enemies.

Jonah is presented to us as a man under direct call from God to act immediately for the saving of an enemy city. He does not agree with God's plans of mercy. He refuses to have a part in showing kindness

to Nineveh. His flight to Tarshish was to escape being a party to God's proposal to give Nineveh a chance to repent. This is clear from his complaint against God after his preaching had been done and he had become chagrined to have Nineveh's destruction averted (4:1, 2). The narrative moves rapidly and in matter-of-fact fashion. While some of the details have been troublesome and have provoked discussion, argument and denunciation, the truth stands clear that the book has a missionary purpose. It points the way to generous acceptance of the Saviour's plan to carry the Gospel to the ends of the earth. This involves foreign missions, and it is this that Jonah resented. He was afraid that his preaching in Nineveh would be successful. He did not want the Ninevites saved. He is not to be condemned too severely for this feeling. He was the product of his race and training. "He reached manhood in the persuasion that the salvation of the world meant the salvation of Israel, and that the climax of divine grace would be attained in the glory of the Jewish nation." It was natural for him to run from duty, when duty seemed so unreasonable. He failed to escape God's call. He was brought to see that he must go to Nineveh, even though he was not changed in attitude toward his desire that Nineveh be destroyed.

GOD CALLS JONAH TO PREACH (3:1-5, 10)

This was the repeated call, and had the tone of an order that must be obeyed. There is no indication that Jonah was willing to go. He felt that he had to go; it was God's command. He was not to choose his own message but was to preach what God told him. Reluctantly, we are sure, Jonah made the journey to the great city. He took up his denunciatory task and proclaimed the impending destruction of Nineveh. Probably he relished the privilege of hurling his burning words into the teeth of these hated people. Thus he showed himself at least outwardly to be *obedient to God*.

His *effective preaching* reached the minds and hearts of the Ninevites. His startling prediction was not belittled as the ravings of a deluded foreigner, but were accepted as a call from God. Deep repentance came over them, even the king decreeing that every external mark of repentance known by him should be displayed. It was not a matter of pretense; there was sincerity in what they did. This God recognized and their *repentance was rewarded*. The reward was that God manifested His mercy and averted the overthrow that was threatened. "No preaching before or since ever produced such results. Is it wonderful that with such contrition the divine pity was aroused, and that God revoked His decree of ruin? Jonah had done his God-given work despite himself."

JONAH COMPLAINS AGAINST GOD (4:1-5)

Jonah had not escaped the thralldom of his narrow nationalism. He still hoped to see Nineveh ruined. He gloated over the personal triumph

when his prophecy of overthrow would be fulfilled. But God had turned against his selfish notions and revealed the larger purpose of sparing Nineveh. Jonah feared to be the laughing stock of the Ninevites and the butt of Jewish ridicule. He felt himself humiliated beyond recovery. So he was exceedingly angry and told Jehovah that it had turned out just as he had predicted, when he ran away from the first call to preach in Nineveh. He knew then that God's mercy would be shown to Nineveh. Of all things that was what he did not want. He would rather die than be a witness of the sparing of Nineveh as the result of his preaching. But God chided him, "Doest thou well to be angry?" God called him to examine the motive for his anger. God wanted Jonah to see his own mistakes.

GOD CENSURES JONAH'S NARROWNESS (6-11)

Jonah had not learned his lesson. He still hoped for Nineveh's destruction. He sat on the hill overlooking the busy city, now all astir as a result of his disturbing preaching, waiting to see what would happen. Over his head was the burning sun; in his heart was a hot anger. God tried to teach him the broadness of His mercy and the wickedness of his own cruel desire. He was an example of harshest inhumanity. But God was sorry for him and wanted him to see the glory of saving a people and experience the joy of having turned the wicked city to God. The method God used was strange but it struck home to Jonah. God prepared the gourd during the night and Jonah enjoyed its shade when the sun shone. He appreciated the worth of the gourd; he hoped it would last as long as he needed it. God caused it to wither before noon and the sultry, hot wind dried it up. Jonah suffered from exposure to the heat and showed his anger for the failure of the gourd. He told God he might as well die.

Defiantly Jonah told God he was justified in being angry about the loss of the gourd. But God "reprimands him only with a still small voice of gentle remonstrance: 'Thou hast had pity on the gourd, and should not I have pity on Nineveh, that great city,' its guiltless children, its dumb cattle?'"

There the record ends. Whether or not Jonah changed his views is not indicated. Maybe he died hating himself for being the messenger of God that saved Nineveh. But he had heard the truth from God that His mercy extends to all mankind and that narrowness has no place in the attitudes of men who would serve Him. However, Jonah was not bad at heart; he was wrong in his prejudices. "No ungodly man could have composed the prayer like that" in chapter three. Jesus thought of him as a great, sincere prophet. "So we ought to be taught that deep, personal piety often exists with extreme and most anti-Christian bigotry" (*Hastings*). We should always realize that God's grace is for all mankind and that Christians should rejoice when others receive His blessings.

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING NOT LIKING GOD'S PLAN

Certainly Jonah showed his dislike for what God planned. God wanted to give Nineveh a chance to be saved; His plan was well laid for this. Jonah despised the plan and tried to keep out of it. But his resentment of the plan did not change it or change God's purpose.

Our country is full, it seems, of people who do not like God's plans. Hence the list of quasi-religious organizations posing as advocates of a better religion than God has planned. They change the matter of sin into a trivial error that requires no crucified Saviour to make atonement. They decry the Church as a despicable parasite and belittle the Gospel it proclaims and the missionary enterprise it fosters. They show their dislike for God's plans by proposing better plans and some of them are unscrupulous enough to pretend to retain God while spurning His plans.

VICTIMS OF PREJUDICE

Prejudice is splendid when it ties a man to what is just and right, but it is hazardous when it links him to what is false. Jonah was a victim of the latter kind of prejudice. He was a Jew, all for Jews, with everybody else outcasts. His prejudice got him into embarrassing troubles and exposed him to just ridicule. Only the mercy of God preserved him from being destroyed.

We have our prejudices that are wrong; none is free from them. Against such dangerous feelings towards others we ought to be guarded. Fights of all sorts grow out of prejudice falsely directed. Churches have engaged in disgraceful practices as a result of nurturing prejudices. Race riots spring from narrow prejudice. But the worst sufferers in the end are, Jonah-like, the victims of their own prejudice. Probably we would be less amenable to our prejudices if we took to ourselves the old, old statement, "God made man in his own image, in the image of God made he him." If that is true prejudice has but little to stand on.

UNWILLING OBEDIENCE

It is true that Jonah obeyed God, but it is clear that it was under protest. He went and preached in Nineveh because he could not get out of it. It is to be questioned whether Jonah could take any credit for his obedience. He surely did not have the feeling about it that other prophets had, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, or Amos.

Forced obedience may be good for the child, and his future worth may be affected by his learning to obey, whether it pleases him or not. When he grows up he will be more likely to understand the justification of the rules he must obey. But it is when he has learned that this or that ought to be obeyed, because to obey is right and best for others as well as himself, that he begins to arrive at obedience such as God expects of us. There must be an inner conviction that what God asks is just. "Whate'er God wills let that be done; His will is ever wisest."

ATTAINING GOD-MINDEDNESS

This is an ideal far ahead of us. How shall we reach up to the mind of God? Is it desirable that we should try? Certainly, when the mind of God considers the children of men, regardless of who they are, as worthy of His mercy and as subjects of redemption, it ought to be our longing to have similar thoughts of them.

Have you known persons who approximated the mind of God in their thinking about other people? Have you considered the worker, who, in Christ's name and for His sake, ministers to any race, under any conditions, doing it willingly and gladly? Does it not seem that such are reaching up to the state of God-mindedness? We might ask ourselves whether or not we want to reach that state, if it means so magnanimous a dealing with various sorts of folk. Maybe we are not any surer than was Jonah that the love of God includes everybody.

CHAFING UNDER SUCCESS

There is a story told of a man who prayed fervently in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." The next day he was shocked to see certain buildings of his, which he had rented to people carrying on sinful businesses, being emptied of tenants and the equipment being destroyed. He demanded explanation and was told, "Your prayer is answered; the kingdom has come and God's will is being done." His prayer was a success but he did not like the results.

Jonah preached vigorously. Nineveh repented and God's purpose was changed from destruction to preservation. Jonah's work was really a great success, as we see it and as God judged it, but Jonah chafed under the success. He did not want his success at all. Have you ever said, "Yes; I'll help, but I hope the whole plan fails." Many a man has given his name to a cause as a matter of policy but secretly worked against the cause. It is said that men talk one way and vote another. It is a sad reflection on any man who despises his own successes.

CLOUDED BY BIGOTRY

And they are heavy, thick clouds, completely shutting out the light. They make the way gloomy and fearful. Bigotry is a curse on the bigot and a danger to all he touches. Jonah was thus afflicted. He knew better than God and told God so. He registered a complaint against the plans of God; only a confirmed bigot would do that. The bigot will not see good anywhere but in himself and in what he does or possesses.

The political bigot assumes that every man of the opposite party is a rascal and that no policy of the opposition can be honest. Members of one denomination run into the shades of bigotry when they claim that all God's favors are for them and that all others are wrong in doctrine and faulty in practice. They limit the Spirit of God.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

Review the titles and lesson goals of the lessons of the quarter. Study the character traits brought out in each lesson.

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 8.

(American Standard Revision Text)

1. O Jehovah, our Lord,
How excellent is thy name in all the
earth,
Who hast set thy glory upon the
heavens!

2. Out of the mouth of babes and
sucklings hast thou established
strength.

Because of thine adversaries,
That thou mightest still the enemy
and the avenger.

3. When I consider thy heavens, the
work of thy fingers,
The moon and the stars, which thou
hast ordained;

4. What is man, that thou art mind-
ful of him?

And the son of man, that thou visit-

est him?

5. For thou hast made him but little
lower than God,
And crownest him with glory and
honor.

6. Thou makest him to have domin-
ion over the works of thy hands;
Thou hast put all things under his
feet:

7. All sheep and oxen,
Yea, and the beasts of the field,

8. The birds of the heavens, and the
fish of the sea,
Whatsoever passeth through the
paths of the seas.

9. O Jehovah, our Lord,
How excellent is thy name in all the
earth!

GOLDEN TEXT: The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom; A good under-
standing have all they that do his commandments: His praise endureth for-
ever.—Psalm 110: 10.

LESSON GOAL.—To discover through a study of the experiences, attitudes, and
actions of representative men and women of the Old Testament the factors
which determined their characters, and to create in the pupil an earnest
desire and purpose to avoid their mistakes, and to express in his personal life
and in all his relationships their spirit and ideals so far as these were in har-
mony with those of Christ.

REVIEW PLAN

I. THE PRODUCTIVE CAUSE OF GREATNESS.

1. A Need to be Met.
2. A Usable Person.
3. Co-operation with God.

II. TRUTHS FROM THE CHARACTERS STUDIED.

III. THE GREATNESS OF THE GOD-FEARING.

INTRODUCTORY

In limiting the choice of representative men and women of the Old
Testament to a dozen individuals, necessarily many notable persons will
be omitted. There may not be agreement that this is the best selection
that could be made, but the fact will be clear that the characters studied
during the past three months deserve the attention of all Bible students.
All of them possessed human qualities for good and evil, all made mis-
takes and all contributed something of lasting worth to their day, and
merit a place in the history of our religion. Not all attained to like
degrees of distinction; in their generation some were more widely
and more favorably known than others. But all were useful in their
own way to their people and to God.

THE PRODUCTIVE CAUSE OF GREATNESS

The men and women studied during the quarter are listed among the great of Old Testament record. What made them great? Are any causes clearly inseparable from their rise to honor among the people of the Bible? Probably there are a multiplicity of causes, but it seems that they may be reduced to three, which apply to each character we have attempted to analyze.

The fact that there was *a need to be met* stands first. Because there was a condition to be remedied, a work to be done, a truth to be declared, it became necessary to have someone assigned a definite piece of work. These needs were measured by God and He decided to meet them by employing a prepared human agent. Had there been no need for them, none of these persons would have been called by God and commissioned to go here or there, to say this or that, to do one thing or another. Needs, often emergencies, sudden crises, are the first explanation for our heroes.

A usable person must be assumed as elemental to all greatness. This is a trite saying. It needs no proof through argument. Our general observation substantiates the fact that before any persons can become great they must be usable. They must have qualities and qualifications to be sure, but these will avail for nothing except in persons who can be used. Disposition and attitude must be right. Willingness and conformity must be present. The elements of usability must be inherent in the individual before he can ascend the hill to greatness. A glance at the persons we have studied will show that they were usable; usable by people and usable by God. Had they not been used no greatness would have been linked to their life and name.

But the chief cause of their greatness, the most productive of all the causes, was their *co-operation with God*. It was what they allowed God to do with them and through them that lifted them above the common ranks and installed them as leaders, meriting a rating as one of the great. Take any one of the lives briefly sketched during the quarter and the outstanding truth is that he or she was a worker together with God, one co-operating with God. Each in turn could agree with the divine promise, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit.

TRUTHS FROM THE CHARACTERS STUDIED

Abraham.—The explanation of the career of Abraham is his unquestioning faith in Jehovah. He had no precedent to follow. He was asked to make sacrifices which involved surrender of his homeland and of his associates. He was put in the position where he must submerge his judgment and desires under his faith. He was a daring adventurer with nothing to direct him except the promise that God would show him. His record is startling with its remarkable achievements. He reached a new land and occupied it. He met distressing problems and solved them. He manifested exceptional magnanimity. He stood

firm when it would have been easier to do otherwise. He left behind him a record frequently illuminated with bright spots of worship, of close friendship with Jehovah, of triumphant faith. One runs through the life story of Abraham, tracing his journeyings from Ur of the Chaldees to his sepulcher in Hebron, and reaches the conviction that he was truly a *pioneer of faith*.

Jacob.—Jacob seemed to get off with a bad start. His natural disposition was against him. His mother's influence was not helpful to make him a stalwart for exacting righteousness. His father was not stern enough to curb the selfish tendency of his son. His brother was tantalizing because he did not enjoy the things that appealed to Jacob and had but little regard for the place it was his right to fill. Selfishly Jacob plotted to supplant Esau and with success. Forced to flee, Jacob went to a far country and spent twenty years in service for which he received great possessions and a family. He began early the struggle between yielding to his own traits and obeying Jehovah. He practiced trickery for it was natural to him. He acquired a sense of reverence for God and received God's blessing. He finally suppressed his evil bent and gave his better self a chance. He prospered under God's help and came to his old age approved by God and honored by men. Viewing his whole life we may say of Jacob that he was a *selfish man transformed*.

Moses.—The tragedy of enslaved Israel paved the way for the career of Moses. He was a child of fortune in that he was marvelously saved from death and was granted all the privileges of a prince in Pharaoh's court. Racial loyalty and inherent resentment of oppression led to his crime against an Egyptian. He fled for his life. He spent forty years quietly as a shepherd and learned self-control, helpful service and communion with Jehovah. His call to emancipate his brethren was unique but it sent Moses on his difficult task. He waged a hard but victorious conflict for the freedom of Israel. He led them to safety and brought them through costly but enriching experiences until the promised land was in view. He met and handled perplexing situations. He established a great people in the worship of God. He went in the van of Israel when a weaker man would have run for protection. In every sense Moses was a *courageous leader*.

Deborah.—Israel was settled in Canaan. The tribal allotment of lands had been made. The inter-relation of the tribes was gradually becoming closer, but the influence of paganish neighbors turned many away from God. Disasters followed as God sold them to their enemies who made of them tributaries and serfs. Deborah strode forth and claimed the right to advise the people. She was God-fearing and nation-loving. She called Barak to gather an army on Mt. Tabor and lead it against Sisera in Esdraelon. She promised her presence to inspire and give confidence. She was as good as her word. The outcome of the

campaign of Sisera was his defeat and death, while Deborah's cause was victorious. With true zeal for Jehovah she gave Him all the credit, even when she had been the human instrument that planned the deliverance of Israel from the Canaanites. In very truth Deborah was *a leader in a national emergency*.

Naomi and Ruth.—Two women of different races and with different ancestral religions were thrown together by a natural turn of circumstances. Famine drove Naomi and her family from Bethlehem to Moab and one of her sons became Ruth's husband. Death wrought havoc with Naomi's family and she with her daughters-in-law were left alone. The urge for the homeland was strong and Naomi decided to return. Ruth clung to her, pledging to accept her people, her God, her lodging place and her burying place. It was a rise above prejudices that gave Ruth willingness to forsake Moab and enter Bethlehem. There was a love between these two women that submerged all racial differences. The turnover of events rewarded Ruth for her unselfish devotion to Naomi and Naomi for her willingness to adopt a Moabitess as one of her own family. The story is beautiful; its suggestions of right attitudes among different races and nations are timely. It offers to our day *a study in racial relationships*.

Hannah.—The mother of Samuel was *a godly mother*. Her heart was sad because she was childless. She made her affliction a matter of earnest prayer to Jehovah. The sadness of her life was increased because she was chided for having no son to honor her. Her prayer was heard and in due time Samuel was born. He was an answer to her prayer and she gave him a name which meant that he had been asked of God. Her pledge was that her son should be given to the service of Jehovah. She consecrated him to his life work before he was born. Samuel entered life as a child given to God. Hannah followed up her vow by putting the child under the care of Eli so that he might be taught and trained for priestly service. Hannah did not forget her boy when he was away from home. She thought tenderly of him and annually she carried to him a little robe which her own hands had made. Her reward came in knowing that her boy developed into a God-used man. Her record is that of a woman whose chief interest in life centered in the religious life and usefulness of her son.

Saul.—It would be hard to imagine a man with better prospects for earthly success than Saul's. He came from a good family and tribe. He had a fine physique. He had the qualities of a king to match with the kings of neighboring nations. He had the applause of his people and the assistance of Samuel. The blessings of Jehovah were his favors. He began to reign with every prospect promising. Years of success attended him. But he lost his grip on God. He turned his thoughts to self-praise and put God temporarily out of the picture. He allowed jealousy to ruin his disposition and hinder his usefulness. He became the victim of his own false practices. He heard the sad announcement

from Samuel that he was to lose the kingdom and that his successor would not be of his family. He allowed ingratitude to distort his judgment. He came to his tragic death, a man unfaithful to his natural kingly qualities. He was truly *a man of great possibilities who failed.*

Jonathan and David.—This classic record of strange but staunch friendship has often been cited to show what can happen between men of widely separated ranks in life. Jonathan, the crown prince, and David, the shepherd of Bethlehem, became friends. Strangely enough the impulse of this friendship surged first through the soul of Jonathan. David proved worthy of that friendship. Together they preserved it loyally. Though death hung over them neither was untrue to the other. Jonathan dared to plead with his enraged father for David. The two were bound together by a sacred covenant that neither would break. The dirge of David over the death of Jonathan spoke of him as "my brother" and added, "Very pleasant hast thou been to me; thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women." David's friendship reached beyond Jonathan to his crippled son, Mephibosheth, to whom he showed remarkable kindness for his father's sake. This is an account of an intimate personal relationship, *a noble friendship.*

Amos.—Amos, of Tekoah, was of the humble serving class. In a region six miles south of Bethlehem he tended his sheep and used his spare time in dressing sycamore trees. He seems to have traveled into other countries, going as far as Egypt to the south and Damascus to the north. He was a called man of God, sent to prophesy against the iniquities of Israel. His words were couched in figures drawn from the out of doors and applied to the sins of the people. He was a scathing, fearless, unyielding, uncompromising man. He had but one purpose and that was to make known God's judgment against sinful Israel. He took his divine call seriously and answered it faithfully. Of his personal life and history scarcely anything is recorded. What we know of him is found in his own account of himself, which declares that he was *a herdsman called of God to be a prophet.*

Josiah.—For thirty-one years Josiah reigned over Judah. He started as a boy and ended in a tragic death in an ill-advised battle against Neco, Pharaoh of Egypt. His life was given to obeying God. He wanted to know the God of David and to establish the true worship of Jehovah. He decreed the destruction of idolatry. He directed that the temple should be repaired. He learned what God's Word had to say about the punishments that come to the wicked. He gave the people opportunity to hear direct from God's Word just what His commandments were. He planned that the great passover feast should be renewed and saw to it that provisions for its proper celebration were made. He was in a true sense a religious leader of his people. He did not allow his position as king to prevent his active endeavors in looking after the spiritual welfare of the nation. He arose above his kingly honors and honored himself before God and the people by being *a royal reformer.*

Jeremiah.—Though of priestly family Jeremiah received the call and commission to be a prophet. He hesitated, not feeling qualified for the dignified task, but assumed his work when assured that God would be with him. He understood the sinful tendencies of the people and grieved over them. He denounced fearlessly when to do so meant sure unpopularity and threatened his life. He saw the false doctrine of wholesale responsibility and set before the people the truth about personal responsibility to God. He advised concerning the right attitude toward the besieging enemies but his advice was ignored and he was imprisoned as a traitor. He faced death but never wavered from his fixed purpose to tell the truth as God gave him the truth. He tried to deal with individuals, hoping to bring about the ultimate strengthening of the nation by the establishment of right relations of individuals to God. He was himself an example of what he taught. He stands out as a *prophet of individual religion*.

Jonah.—Jonah exemplifies the teachings and practices of his day. He hated the Gentiles and deplored any suggestion on God's part that He had any concern for them. Jonah was a nationalist of the narrowest sort. He rebelled against God's plan for him to preach in Nineveh, but, under protest, finally went. His preaching was with zeal for it predicted destruction for despised Nineveh. He complained against the forgiving love of God and refused to see that there was any justification in heeding the repentance of the Ninevites and deferring their destruction. God tried to show him that he was wrong in his contracted conception of divine love. Jonah clung to his old ideas and continued to lament the fact that through his preaching Nineveh had repented. When we read through the book of Jonah we see in the *narrow nationalist rebuked* a God-sent admonition that we should never be guilty of attempting to retain the message of God's love wholly for ourselves.

THE GREATNESS OF THE GOD-FEARING

Glancing back over the records of these fourteen individuals into whose life stories we have dipped, we must attribute to them some degrees of greatness. Account for these as we may, we are brought to the necessary conclusion that their reverence for God which led them to obey His will and follow His guidance had most to do with making them great. If we try to separate what the presence and power of God contributed to their achievements we will be forced to acknowledge that there is not enough remaining to make a basis for their splendid careers. They were God-fearing and so could be God-used, and it was as they were used by God that they soared above the rank and file and made a name of greatness for themselves.

"Leave God to order all thy ways,
And hope in Him whate'er betide,
Thou'lt find in Him, in evil days,
Thy all-sufficient strength and guide.
Who trusts in God's unchanging love
Builds on the rock that naught can move."



THE RICH YOUNG RULER

FOURTH QUARTER

Representative Men and Women of the New Testament

Fourth
Quarter

ZACHARIAS AND ELISABETH: LIFE IN A PIOUS JEWISH HOME

Lesson I
October 5

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LESSON TEXT: Luke 1: 5-80. (Print verses 5, 6, 57-66, 76-80.)

(American Standard Revision Text)

5. There was in the days of Herod, king of Judæa, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abijah: and he had a wife of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth.

6. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.

57. Now Elisabeth's time was fulfilled that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son.

58. And her neighbors and her kinsfolk heard that the Lord had magnified his mercy towards her; and they rejoiced with her.

59. And it came to pass on the eighth day, that they came to circumcise the child; and they would have called him Zacharias, after the name of his father.

60. And his mother answered and said, Not so; but he shall be called John.

61. And they said unto her, There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name.

62. And they made signs to his father, what he would have him called.

63. And he asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they marvelled all.

64. And his mouth was opened im-

mediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, blessing God.

65. And fear came on all that dwelt round about them: and all these sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hill country of Judæa.

66. And all that heard them laid them up in their heart, saying, What then shall this child be? For the hand of the Lord was with him.

76. Yea and thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Most High:

For thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to make ready his ways;

77. To give knowledge of salvation unto his people

In the remission of their sins,

78. Because of the tender mercy of our God,

Whereby the dayspring from on high shall visit us,

79. To shine upon them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death;

To guide our feet into the way of peace.

80. And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his showing unto Israel.

GOLDEN TEXT: And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.—Luke 1: 6.

LESSON GOAL: To study an ancient Jewish home for the purpose of acquainting ourselves with the conditions in the midst of which there was born and grew up one of God's great men.

LESSON PLAN

I. ZACHARIAS AND ELISABETH. (1: 5-23.)

1. Their Lineage.
2. Their Home.
3. The Promise of a Son.

II. THE BIRTH AND NAMING OF THE SON. (1: 57-66.)

III. THE BENEDICTUS. (1: 67-80.)

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

Verse 5: *A certain priest named Zacharias.*—The priestly office was a sacred one. God had set Aaron and his sons aside for this particular office and the tribe of Levi was given them for their attendants. Thus the Levites held a closer relation to God than any of the other tribes while the priests stood even nearer God.

The duties of the priests were many and varied. They watched over the fire on the altar of burnt-offering, filled and trimmed the golden lamp, attended to the showbread and offered the morning and evening sacrifices. Lepers submitted themselves to their inspection and offered gifts for their purification.

Verse 5: *Of the course of Abia.*—David divided the priests into twenty-four courses which did service in regular order in the sanctuary.

Verse 58: *And they rejoiced with her.*—The desire of the Oriental is to have sufficient means and influence to purchase a government position. The home is not the place where the youth are taught how to give service to their country, but how to resist its tyranny. On account of the importance of having an heir to strive to secure such an office that he may show favor to his own, a male child brings joy to a family. When the musicians, waiting on the outside, are informed the new member of the family is a son, they immediately beat the drum, play upon whatever instruments they have and improvise rhymes prophetic of the career before the son and heir.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

For three months we have been studying about some "Representative Men and Women of the Old Testament." For the same length of time we are now to be introduced to some "Representative Men and Women of the New Testament." In the Old Testament section there were four women brought before us, and in the New there will be three. Of course it is not difficult for us to believe that for the most part the men who have been counted worthy to enter this course had good and great mothers, though in only a few cases do we know who they were.

It is rather significant that Luke alone of the four evangelists gives us an account of the early life of the Baptist. The three introduce him only in connection with the ministry of our Lord, and they do not even mention the names of his parents. Here we see one of the advantages in our having the four gospels instead of but one. The names of the godly Zacharias and Elisabeth would not have appeared on the sacred page but for their distinguished son.

We have often heard of the four hundred years elapsing between Malachi and the coming of the Messiah as the "Four Silent Centuries." We shall allow the impressive designation of those years to stand, though we are inclined to believe that they were not so silent as we have sometimes thought. Still as far as the sacred record goes they were quite silent, if we accept Malachi as the latest literary production of the Old Testament. But during those years the Jews were contending for their faith and life. They never yielded, though for most of the time they were under the heels of oppressors. The pharisaical party was zealous for their ancestral beliefs, and it was due to their efforts that Jesus found as much religion abroad in the land as He did. It is in keeping with all the facts to say that the coming of John the Baptist heralded the beginning of a new day, and unlocked the door for the ushering in of a new dispensation.

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

ZACHARIAS AND ELISABETH

1: 5-23. Herod the Great ruled Palestine by the appointment of the Emperor of Rome. His reign extended from 37 to 4 B. C. He perhaps adopted the Jewish religion, though he showed little interest in it, save that he undertook the rebuilding of the Temple. He was a ruler of some ability, though in his personal character he was immoral and dissolute. He did not interfere with the regular worship of his subjects. It was toward the end of his reign that the events of this lesson occurred.

Zacharias was a priest, and therefore a descendant of Aaron, and his wife also belonged to the same priestly line. They were members of the more popular and conservatively religious party among the Jews known as the Pharisees. We are given to understand that they were humble people, and it is not at all likely they were known outside the community in which they lived. He was one of the thousands of priests who were called to the Temple twice a year for a week's service each time. Since he did not reside in Jerusalem, for he had his home in a city in the hill country of Judah, he would sleep in the Temple, or in a room adjacent to it while he was filling his office. Each morning lots were cast to determine who should burn incense on the golden altar within the holy place that day, and since according to tradition there were twenty thousand priests, it is not probable the lot would fall to any individual more than once in a lifetime, for no priest was to serve twice until each had served once. The lot this day fell to Zacharias, and it became the day of all days to him, for this was the highest privilege any priest could enjoy.

But the character of these two persons interests us also. They had a better title to religion than that of descent merely. We are told that "they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." Both in their inner life and in their outward conduct they were without blame. It is impossible for us to exhaust the meaning of verse six. Nothing finer could be said of this husband and wife. It is added that no child was sent to bless their union and to answer the prayers of their pious hearts.

While the priest was offering the incense an angel of the Lord appeared to him. Zacharias was afraid, for he supposed the visitor had come to pronounce some terrible calamity. But the angel quieted his fears, saying that his supplication was at last to be heard, and that there was to be sent into his home a son to whom was to be given the name John, and that the hearts of the parents would be filled with joy and gladness, and many besides would rejoice at his birth. The angel must have cheered the heart of the happy priest most of all when he told him the kind of a child John was to be. He would touch no wine; he would be filled with the Holy Spirit from his birth; he would turn the hearts of many to the Lord; and he would walk before the presence of his God in the spirit and power of Elijah.

THE BIRTH AND NAMING OF THE SON

1: 57-66. There was a period of joyous expectancy in the home of Zacharias, and in due time the baby boy was born. The supplications of these godly people were answered, and the humiliation of their not having a child was removed. Dean Farrar tells us in connection with the word supplication that, "The Greek noun used implies a special prayer, and the tense of the Greek verb shows that Zacharias had just been praying either to have a son, or at least that the days of the Messiah might come." The news of the birth of John spread among the neighbors and kinsfolk, and they came to rejoice with the glad parents. Perhaps it was known with what intense longing Zacharias and Elisabeth had prayed to God for a child, and that their prayers should be answered when they were advanced in years gave added joy to the event. That God should grant them a son in their old age was regarded as a special mark of divine favor. In naming the child John, which means, "to whom Jehovah is gracious," or, "whom Jehovah has graciously given," it is easily possible to see the same thought.

Just as it is customary among us to give the child a name at his baptism, so among the Jews the name was given at circumcision on the eighth day after birth. It is not unusual to give a son the name of the father, and the friends of the devout parents in this case wanted it to be so. But Elisabeth, to whom Zacharias had no doubt communicated the message of the angel with regard to the name, said his name should not be that of the father, but John instead. Then they requested the father to make his wish known. He had to do it in writing, for he was still speechless, and he wrote John. At that moment his speech returned to him, and the first words he spoke were full of blessing.

THE BENEDICTUS

1: 67-80. The word Benedictus is given to this prophetic song of Zacharias because it is the Latin word for blessed, the initial word of the song in our language. The inspired father and priest began by singing the praise of the Lord for visiting His people with salvation. He had in mind what would be wrought both by his own son and the Messiah. Evidences were at hand to show that God had not forgotten His covenant with Abraham, which gave assurance that He would deliver His people from their enemy and cause them to serve Him continually without fear. And more than that such service would be characterized by holiness and righteousness.

Once again the aged priest rejoiced that after the long centuries of silence the voice of the prophet was to be heard in Israel. For John was to announce the coming of the Messiah and so to walk before the face of Jehovah as to prepare the way for His victorious advent. He would do this by announcing to the people that the prerequisite of salvation is thorough-going repentance. Then would Jesus come, the day-spring from on high whose light would bring the people out of darkness and lead them into peace. Read verse 80 carefully.

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

THESE PARENTS

The purpose of this lesson is not primarily to evaluate the person and the ministry of John the Baptist, as helpful as that would be; but rather to study the lives of Zacharias and Elisabeth with the view to discovering what the typical home life was then and is now. The Lesson Committee states that purpose this way: "To discover through a study of the experiences, attitudes and actions of representative men and women of the New Testament the factors which determined their characters." Now we cannot keep John out of the picture, nor would we desire to do so, for he was a part of that home life, and his greatness alone brought the names of his parents into the sacred Scriptures.

THE POWER OF RELIGION

Now and then we hear it said that religion does not make any change in a person's life. The statement is too worthless to deserve an answer. Two persons are brought before us today the beauty of whose lives was what it was because of the power of religion, and nothing else. They did not have all the light we have, but they did not neglect the light they had. Most people have enough to live by if they would only make use of it. I have a better conception of the vitality of the old Jewish religion when I remember that persons like Zacharias and Elisabeth, Joseph and Mary, were the direct products of it. They were blameless before God. They were righteous in their acts. Theirs was not a pharisaical piety, a thin veneer worn chiefly for the purpose of deceiving others. They found God through the enactments of the Mosaic legislation. They rang true, and God honored them for it.

THE COMMON PEOPLE

The parents of John were two of them. They belonged to the rank and file. It is not possible that Herod ever heard of them. They lived in the hill country of Judah, far from the marts of trade, and farther from the currents of society. Perhaps that gave them a better chance to be the kind of people they were. They had time to think of God, and when Zacharias went to the Temple to serve there in the capacity of a priest he put all his soul into it. That could not be said of all the priests who burned incense. Well, let us conclude that the vital forces of any nation's life flow down where the bulk of the people live.

One of the great Scotch reformers was asked, "What will redeem society? What will make the British Empire what it ought to be?" Every one expected him to say great leadership, for there must be men as fearless as Knox, as strong and commanding as Cromwell. But this was not his answer. He said: "Great Britain will be redeemed when the common people and the people at the bottom realize their responsibility. We must teach them that every man has his personal responsibility and his duty to obey."—*John Timothy Stone.*

THE BASIC INSTITUTION

It is now more than twenty years since I listened to Theodore Roosevelt, then President of the United States, address the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church at the American University in Washington. Many persons present were somewhat surprised that he chose the subject he did to speak about to that audience. But I do not see the occasion for the surprise. His subject was "The Christian home." He went on to say that the stability of everything worth while in this country depends on the home, and that the minister has no greater responsibility and no higher privilege than that of making pure and sweet and strong the home life of the American people. Of course he did not say it, and it was not necessary that he should, but every one there knew that his own home life which was then being passed in the White House was ideal. His letters to his children, which have been put into book form, constitute a powerful testimony of the influence of a father in the home. It is one thing to say that the children of tomorrow are in the homes of today; that is commonplace; but it is another thing to say that the character of the children of tomorrow will reflect the character of the homes of today. It was John's greatest fortune that he was born in the home he was.

THE MODERN HOME

It has been said with some degree of truthfulness that the automobile is the home nowadays. That is not to be interpreted against the automobile. It does serve to no small extent to keep the home together, and where that results it is not possible for the forces that tear down the family life to do their worst. But with all the institutions the wisdom of this generation can create there is nothing to take the place of the home in an ordered society. If a child can grow up in and go out from a Christian home he has a heritage that nothing else can equal. One of the sins of so many parents today is that they depend too much on other organizations for the religious training of their children.

SEEING A FUTURE IN THE YOUNG

The highest joy these two godly parents had was found in what they were sure their son would become. In their eyes he was no ordinary boy. No boy is just ordinary to his parents. They dream about his future. They think of the time when he is grown up. They are confident in the belief that he will make good. If they could not believe that they would wish he were in his grave. And when they have that faith they will plan and work accordingly.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

How does the Catholic Church think of Mary, the mother of Jesus? May that be the reason why the Protestant Church makes so little of her? Why do you think God chose her to be the mother of our Saviour?

How do you account for the fact that she kept so quiet in regard to the birth of Jesus? What place did she fill at the marriage at Cana?

Are we right in ascribing large influence to a mother? Does Mother's Day have a just place in the life of the Church? Be prepared to help your pupils to see what they owe their mothers.

MARY THE MOTHER OF JESUS: AN EXAMPLE OF MOTHERHOOD

Lesson II
October 12

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LESSON TEXT: Luke 2: 15-19; John 2: 1-5; 19: 25-27.

(American Standard Revision Text)

Luke 2: 15. And it came to pass, when the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing that is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.

16. And they came with haste, and found both Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in the manger.

17. And when they saw it, they made known concerning the saying which was spoken to them about this child.

18. And all that heard it wondered at the things which were spoken unto them by the shepherds.

19. But Mary kept all these sayings, pondering them in her heart.

John 2: 1. And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there:

2. and Jesus also was bidden, and his disciples, to the marriage.

3. And when the wine failed, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine.

4. And Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come.

5. His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.

John 19: 25. These things therefore the soldiers did. But there were standing by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

26. When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold, thy son!

27. Then saith he to the disciple, Behold, thy mother! And from that hour the disciple took her unto his own home.

GOLDEN TEXT: Mary kept all these sayings, pondering them in her heart.—
Luke 2: 19.

LESSON GOAL: To learn from what we know of Mary, the mother of Jesus, the place, the responsibility and the joy of motherhood.

LESSON PLAN

I. MARY THE MOTHER OF JESUS. (Luke 2: 15-19.)

1. Receiving Shepherd-Guests.
2. Pondering the Meaning of Events.

II. MARY A GUEST AT A WEDDING. (John 2: 1-5.)

1. Seeing a Need.
2. Meeting a Need.

III. MARY A WITNESS AT THE CROSS. (John 19: 25-27.)

1. The Suffering of Her Son.
2. The Care of Her Son.

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

Verse 15: *The shepherds said one to another.*—The shepherd is a humble member of a community in Eastern lands. Some of them today descend in a direct line from the shepherds who were watching their flocks on the Bethlehem hills when Jesus was born.

He lives a wild, lonely life, is a man of fine principle and is faithful to his sheep, protecting them from Bedouin robbers with his life, if need be. He is particularly kind to the lambs of the flock. If a wee one

seems tired he carries it against his bosom or under the folds of his cloak.

John 2: 2: *And both Jesus was called and His disciples to the marriage.*—The first part of the wedding procession in the East is the march of the bridegroom and his friends to the home of the bride, the attendants dancing and shouting as they proceed down the middle of the street. The bridesmaids are supposed to be on the watch for the bridegroom and his party. Then comes the escorting of the bride to the house of the groom. The bride is in gala array, mounted on a donkey, or, if wealthy, on a camel. The groom and his friends are by her side, the women attendants of the bride following behind.

At this wedding, Jesus would have been among the escorts of the bride and inside the house would have been seated near the bridal party.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

I do not now know what led the Lesson Committee to select these three Scripture passages bearing upon the life of Mary; but I assume it was not by chance that in the first we are to see her when a life is brought into the world, that in the second we are to see her when two lives are united in marriage, and that in the third we are to see her when a life is about to pass into the other world. There could hardly be found more solemn, and in many respects more joyous, moments in all one's earthly pilgrimage. The first and the last had to do directly with her Son, and the second indirectly with Him.

Prior to her marriage to Joseph the angel Gabriel appeared to her and announced that by the power of the Holy Spirit she would become the mother of the Saviour of the world. At the command of Cæsar Augustus, the Emperor of Rome, they went to Bethlehem, their ancestral city, for the purpose of being enrolled preparatory to the levying of a tax. While there she brought forth her Son, wrapped Him in swaddling clothes and laid Him in a manger. That night shepherds who were keeping watch over their flocks in the neighboring fields came to the manger to confirm the message of the angel.

Any student of the New Testament will be surprised to find in it so few references to the mother of our Lord. We would expect her name to be mentioned time and again, and her manner of life to be portrayed at length. But this is not the case. Perhaps the very fact that she stood so near to Jesus, sustaining the relationship of mother, accounts for her being completely overshadowed by His personality. Then, too, we must remember the New Testament was written for the express purpose of telling us the story of His life, death, and resurrection, and the bearing they have upon our salvation. No others are brought into the picture save as they related themselves to Him, and then only in a secondary manner,

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

MARY THE MOTHER OF JESUS

Luke 2:15-19. We are concerned at this point, not with the whole Bethlehem narrative, but with the part Mary had in it. She was chosen from among all the women of the world to be the mother of God's Son, our Lord and Saviour. That in itself indicates something of her character, and the hope to which she held steadily that the Messiah would come to bring salvation to her people.

But again we find in the Bethlehem scene that the writer has little to say of Mary. She was a typical mother, caring tenderly for her first-

born, and drawing Him lovingly to her bosom. What numberless mothers had prayed to God might be their good fortune became hers, and hers alone. She could sing as no other could,

“For he that is mighty hath done to me great things.”

What are our Madonnas but human attempts to portray in painting or sculpture a mother's love as we know it was manifested in the mother of the child Jesus? That love may be genuine and profound without being noisy. It is not without significance that she is the first of the three mentioned as having been seen by the shepherds. She has been described as “a young woman of refinement, intelligence, and beauty of character,” and we can believe that she was all of that.

The shepherds had no sooner left the stable than they began telling those they met what wonders their own eyes had beheld. That included the appearance of the angels, their message and their song, together with the confirmation of the good news through their visit to the holy family. This fact becomes all the more impressive when we remember that an Oriental is rarely in a hurry, and that at the same time he is very talkative.

On the contrary we are surprised to learn that Mary was silent in regard to what had come to pass. Perhaps at first thought we would expect her to have been the most communicative of all, for she knew most; there were secrets in her heart that lay beyond the vision of the shepherds. And yet she was silent. But it was not a cold or thoughtless silence. She was absorbed in contemplation. She was busy trying to analyze her experiences, and to harmonize them with her appreciation of the boy she held in her arms. It was not to be expected that she could understand the significance of the honor that had been conferred on her. We may be sure of this however, that she was sensible of the responsibility that came with the gift.

MARY A GUEST AT A WEDDING

John 2: 1-5. This wedding took place in Cana of Galilee, so stated to distinguish it from another town by the same name mentioned in Joshua 19: 28. The one that concerns us is located a few miles north of Nazareth, the home of Jesus.

The mother of Jesus was there. John does not mention her name; he never does, just as he does not mention his own name or that of his brother James. He takes it for granted that she is well known. Besides she had been living with him from the time of the death of her Son, and he had come to think of her as a member of his family.

In what capacity Mary was there we cannot say. It would appear that she was more than a guest. The interest she took when the hour of embarrassment arose would lead us to infer that she bore some responsibility. “Luther supposes that they were some poor near friends of hers, so that she had to act the part of mother of the bride, for she takes an active interest in things, and is very much concerned on discov-

ering that refreshments are running short. Other members of the family were there (v. 12.)” Jesus and His disciples were invited also. It is probable that the disciples were invited because they were the friends of Jesus, for some of them were doubtless strangers to the family.

“With the Jews, as with the heathen, weddings were accompanied by a feast, and the festivities lasted regularly a whole week. According to Hengstenberg the wedding could have lasted but one day, else it could not have been assigned to the third day. Indigent circumstances would not permit of a seven days’ feast. Certainly Jesus is not to be thought of as keeping on with the feast for seven days.”—*Dr. E. J. Wolf*.

In the East hospitality often becomes lavish, so that with families in moderate circumstances it is likely to lead to embarrassment. In the midst of the feast the refreshments ran out, and Mary assumed the responsibility for relieving the situation. She turned to her Son for help. Was it because she had relied on Him so much back in her own home? When she brought the matter to His attention He replied, “Woman, what have I to do with thee?” or, “What is that to you and me?” It is doubtful if we should put into those words the sharpness of rebuke, for the Greek carries a more tender meaning than the English. He probably meant the time had come when He would have to control entirely His own course of action.

MARY A WITNESS AT THE CROSS

John 19:25-27. One of the saddest moments in the life of Mary was when she stood by the cross on which her Son was dying. Any seeming harshness in His conversation with her previously, as in the Temple, Luke 2:49, or at the wedding at Cana, John 2:4, receives its true interpretation in that most tender thought He had toward her when He was suffering excruciatingly on the cross.

She was still His mother, and He was still her Son, and He did not even in this last moment forget that fact. And while He had come amongst men to establish the most vital spiritual relationships with all races and kindreds, He would be mindful of the fact that it was she who had brought Him into the world and watched over Him during all those years He spent in the home with her.

It was His will that she be cared for all the rest of her days. Just why He did not commit her to His own brothers we have no way of knowing. We only know that He asked John, the beloved disciple, to make the provision for her he would for his own mother. His gracious thought of her must have touched her heart deeply.

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

MARY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Some of our readers may want to go further than our suggested lesson text leads them, and look up all the references to Mary, the mother of Jesus, in the New Testament. I shall not list those in the

MARY THE MOTHER OF JESUS: AN
EXAMPLE OF MOTHERHOOD

first two chapters of Matthew and the first two chapters of Luke, which relate to us the infancy of our Lord. Of course Mary is given a prominent place all through that record. The others are: the visit to the Temple, Luke 2: 41-52; the wedding at Cana, John 2:1-5; Mary's concern for His state of health, Matt. 12: 46-50; at the cross, John 19: 25-27; in the upper room in Jerusalem, The Acts 1:14. Her name is not mentioned in the development and expansion of the early Church. There is no hint as to the time of her death or the place of her burial. Well has it been said that "as presented in the Scripture she is simply a beautiful example of a devoted and pious mother."

MARY IN THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

Dr. E. J. Wolf in *The Higher Rock*, after pointing out the unwarranted authority of the Catholic Church in claiming that Mary was sinless and in addressing to her more worship and more prayers than to her sinless and divine Son, goes on to remark:

"From all this paganizing of the Gospel, Protestantism recoils with horror, but such is naturally the force of the rebound that **we** strike another extreme, and withhold the meed of our reverence from her who according to the Scriptures is to be called blessed of all nations. As if Mary were responsible for these abominable idolatries, we seem to cherish harsh prejudice against her, to disparage her character, to overlook her resplendent office, and disdainfully to ignore what she **was** to God and what she was for us. Some people have well-nigh a feeling of aversion to the name; some would be ashamed to betray any special reverence for the mother of their Lord. . . . Between the two extremes is doubtless found the golden truth."

MARY THE MOTHER OF JESUS

We are sure to have our attention arrested by the thought that God chose this woman to be the mother of His Son. When the fulness of time had come, and the hour had struck when a new era of grace was to be ushered into the world, she was chosen of all the fair daughters of the race as the instrument for the accomplishment of God's eternal counsel of grace. It cannot be doubted that her manner of life corresponded in no small measure with the holy office she was to fill. This peculiar honor was not for the rich or those who had received worldly fame; it was reserved for her who, though she could trace her lineage back to King David, was a peasant woman living in an obscure village that nestled among the hills of Galilee. That God should draw her into fellowship with Himself and make her a partner in the mystery of the incarnation places her high in the list of those saintly souls who through meditation, prayer, and implicit trust, become the friends of God.

MARY IN THE HOME

We dare not forget that Jesus grew up in the home in which Mary exemplified all that was and is beautiful in motherhood. When the

visit to the Temple at the time Jesus became twelve years of age was ended we read that "he went down with them, and came to Nazareth; and he was subject unto them." It is commonly believed that Joseph did not live long after that event. That means the responsibility of keeping the home together devolved upon this noble mother. She did not fail. That He shared the responsibility none can doubt. Between the two there must have been an ideal relationship. She was not unmindful of the revelation that had been made to her in the past as to His future. As she treasured the many wonderful sayings that had been vouchsafed to her, pondering them in her heart, she was all the more mindful of her obligation to Him. Being always of a meditative turn of mind, she would build into her home those influences which would prepare her children for the future.

THE HAPPY MOTHER

We have the right to believe that Mary enjoyed life. She was no ascetic, withdrawing herself from all pleasures. She was interested in seeing to it that everything moved along smoothly at the wedding at Cana. She enjoyed all that was festive and gladsome on that occasion. Her Son imitated her in this respect. She had set the example of rejoicing with those who rejoice. Even if the contracting parties had been forced to live beneath the level of comfortable circumstances, Mary was intent upon bringing into the home all the joy she could. The picture we have of her at the wedding, as of her Son also, is a delightful one.

FAITHFUL TO THE END

Who would not expect Mary to be with her Son when the deepest sorrow of His life came like a flood upon Him? Even though she had not been able to understand everything He did, nevertheless the deepest instincts of motherhood would prompt her to be present when He was led to the cross. If there was any ministry she could render she would be there to perform it. She had brought Him into the world; she had held Him in her arms; she had taught Him to lisp her speech; she had instructed Him in the Word of God and introduced Him to His heavenly Father; she had watched Him grow toward manhood; she had lived for Him and would have died for Him; and now she stood by while He suffered for the sins of the world, in the benefit of which sacrifice she was included. If she did not know then, she was to know a little later the full meaning of His life and death for her.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

What is told us of Simeon's character? What is to be understood by the statement that he was "looking for the consolation of Israel?" How could the Holy Spirit be upon him when the Spirit was not given until Pentecost? What had been revealed to him? When and how was this fulfilled? Why do we call his song, *The Nunc Dimittis*? What did he reveal to Mary as to the future of her Son?

Who was Anna? For what did she give thanks? Whom did she tell what she saw? How did the truth of the golden text apply in the case of these two aged persons?

SIMEON AND ANNA: THE INSIGHT OF THE PURE IN HEART

Lesson III
October 19

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LESSON TEXT: Luke 2: 25-39.

(American Standard Revision Text)

25. And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

26. And it had been revealed unto him by the Holy Spirit, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

27. And he came in the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, that they might do concerning him after the custom of the law,

28. then he received him into his arms, and blessed God, and said,

29. Now lettest thou thy servant depart, Lord,

According to thy word, in peace;

30. For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,

31. Which thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples;

32. A light for revelation to the Gentiles,

And the glory of thy people Israel.

33. And his father and his mother

were marvelling at the things which were spoken concerning him;

34. and Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the falling and the rising of many in Israel; and for a sign which is spoken against;

35. yea and a sword shall pierce through thine own soul; that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed.

36. And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher (she was of a great age, having lived with a husband seven years from her virginity,

37. and she had been a widow even unto fourscore and four years), who departed not from the temple, worshipping with fastings and supplications night and day.

38. And coming up at that very hour she gave thanks unto God, and spake of him to all them that were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

39. And when they had accomplished all things that were according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth.

GOLDEN TEXT: Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.—
Matt. 5: 8.

LESSON GOAL: To call attention to the source of joy they have who receive Jesus the Saviour into their hearts.

LESSON PLAN

I. SIMEON'S EXPECTATION. (Vs. 25, 26.)

II. SIMEON'S REWARD. (Vs. 27, 28.)

III. SIMEON'S SONG. (Vs. 29-32.)

IV. SIMEON'S PROPHECY. (Vs. 33-35.)

V. ANNA'S NEW-FOUND JOY. (Vs. 36-39.)

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

Verse 25: *Waiting for the consolation of Israel.*—Simeon was one of a group of people known in his day as Prosdechomenoi, or, they that were waiting. Deeply distressed over the degradation of their country, which had known a glorious past, and its subjection to the Roman Empire, they lived in expectation of a better time when their country would be free. They spoke of this better day as the time when "the Kingdom of God would come."

Verse 27: *The custom of the law.*—The rite of circumcision was observed on the eighth day after his birth, on which occasion the child was named, the name, after the Bible custom, frequently expressive of the parents' gratitude to God. Frequently the name was given in honor of a relative, although the father's name, usually, is not the one selected.

Hebrew names always carried a significance, oftentimes a prophecy, as in the name Jesus, "For He shall save the people from their sins."

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

The first two chapters of Luke are peculiar to that Gospel; that is, they are not to be found in Matthew, Mark, or John. We have already studied two lessons in this quarter, and the material for both of them is recorded by Luke alone. The same is true of our lesson for today. "He alone tells us of the birth and infancy of the Baptist; the Annunciation; the meeting of Mary and Elisabeth; the songs of the herald angels; the Circumcision; the Presentation in the Temple; the growth in universal favor and sweet submission. And he alone preserves the one anecdote of the confirmation of Jesus at twelve years old which is the solitary flower gathered from the silence of thirty years."

We naturally inquire as to the source upon which Luke drew for his material. It was of such a closely personal character. The facts he records were not given general publicity, much less proclaimed from the housetops. It is necessary for us to add also that Luke was not one of the immediate followers of Jesus, and probably never saw Him. So far as we know he was a convert of Paul. Then how did he get the facts that concerned the home life of Zacharias and Elisabeth, and Joseph and Mary? We shall let another give us his opinion.

"The elaborate style of the preface (Luke 1:1-4) is at once replaced by one of extreme directness and simplicity; full of Hebraic expressions; showing that here St. Luke begins to use, and probably to translate, some Aramaic document which had come into his hands. The remainder of this chapter is known as the *Protevangelium*—the Gospel History before the birth of Christ. The sweetness and delicate reserve of the narrative, together with the incidents on which it dwells, have led to the not unreasonable conjecture that the Virgin Mary had written down some of those things which she long 'kept in her heart.'"—Dean Farrar in *The Cambridge Bible*.

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

It devolved upon Joseph and Mary to bring Jesus their firstborn Son into the Temple, "to present Him to the Lord, to whom the firstborn of all animals as well as men specifically belonged (Ex. 13:2), in memory of the deliverance from Egypt. By divine arrangement the Levites as a body took the place of the firstborn of Israel in the temple service (Num. 8:17-19), and each firstborn child was to be redeemed by the payment of five shekels."—*The Lutheran Commentary*.

SIMEON'S EXPECTATION

Vs. 25, 26. The name Simeon was a very common one, and so far as can be learned this man is unknown apart from this incident. He belonged, like Zacharias, Elisabeth and Anna, to those pious Jews who were daily expecting the coming of the Messiah. He did not belong to that group of persons who lived near the Temple and yet neglected it. He was upright in his conduct and of a spiritual frame of mind. He was conscientious in religious matters. The Messiah, in his thought, was

not only another righteous and devout man, but the Son of God, who had been promised by the prophets, and who with His coming would bring to His people the comfort for which they had been looking. Simeon had been protected, guided and illuminated by the Holy Spirit who, though not given in full measure until Pentecost, moved upon the hearts of individuals.

The revelation the Spirit made to Simeon was both negative and positive; in the first place he was not to see death; and in the second place he was to see the Lord's Christ. Then death would come, but with all its terrors taken away. Sometimes the "Lord's Christ" is translated as the "Christ of God," as in Luke 9:20; and in both cases the meaning is the Lord's Anointed, or the Messiah. Through the reading of the prophecies and the inner impulse of the Spirit this man knew it was to be granted him to see the Saviour before going hence.

SIMEON'S REWARD

Vs. 27, 28. All Simeon's conduct was under the direction of the Holy Spirit. There seems to have been no particular reason why he should appear in the Temple at this time. But directed by the Spirit he went, taking his place probably in the court of the women. Presently there appeared Joseph and Mary with the child Jesus. "The Arabic Gospel of the Infancy says that he saw Him shining like a pillar of light in His mother's arms, which is probably derived from v. 32." The Spirit who revealed to this man the postponement of death until he should look upon the face of the Messiah, now revealed to him that the child about to be presented to the Lord in the usual manner was the Messiah.

With a joy that grew out of his patient waiting and devout worshiping he took the child Jesus in his arms. "Here we have the Old recognizing and embracing the New; the slave recognizing and submitting to his Owner; and the saint recognizing and welcoming the approach of death."—*Maclaren*.

SIMEON'S SONG

Vs. 29-32. There are four imperishable songs in the first two chapters of Luke: The Magnificat, 1:46-55; The Benedictus, 1:68-79; the Gloria in Excelsis, 2:14; and the Nunc Dimittis by Simeon. The Nunc Dimittis has been a part of the evening service of the Christian Church since the fifth century. It has been considered an appropriate closing to the Communion Service and is now so used.

The first words of this song are striking. They could well be translated, "Now thou unloosest thy slave." The aged saint wanted to be released from a long period of faithful service. His cup was running over, for his eyes had seen the consolation of Israel. What was there more to live for? He had lived his life; he had sung his song; and now his eyes, like the eagle's, were fixed upon the heaven awaiting him.

But we must not pass over the universalism of this song. The coming of the Messiah was to reveal and add to the glory of Israel, and it was also to be a light to the Gentiles. They were to look unto Him and be saved too.

SIMEON'S PROPHECY

Vs. 33-35. Joseph and Mary marvelled both at the conduct and the words of Simeon. How glad they must have been when they heard him foretell the blessing their Son would bring to all nations!

But now under the same inspiration he gave them the first intimation of the sufferings which the Messiah was to endure in His strife against a corrupt people. They would not all hear and obey, nor would they tolerate His presence. Some would accept Him, others would reject Him. To some He would be a stone upon which they would rise, to others a stone over which they would stumble and fall. Contrary to the purpose of God the coming of His Son was the occasion of the sharper separation of men into two groups, the one welcoming the privilege of the larger light, the other rejecting the light and choosing to live in darkness. And Mary lived to see this conflict, for she survived her Son; and only she knew what grief it brought her.

ANNA'S NEW-FOUND JOY

Vs. 36-39. This woman is well spoken of. She was a prophetess, living close to God and speaking His message. She was especially devoted to the worship of the Temple, for if she did not dwell in one of its chambers or corridors, she at least never missed a service, and she spent an unusual amount of time in prayer. She too had long been looking for the consolation of Israel, or the coming of the Messiah. It so happened that one of her visits to the Temple fell at the time when the parents of Jesus had brought Him there for presentation to the Lord. Either by what she heard Simeon say, or by the aid of the Spirit, she knew that this babe was the Messiah, the long-looked-for One, and she thanked God. And she spoke about Him to all who shared with her the blessed hope.

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

THE NUMBER FIVE

Five is not a sacred number in the Bible, as are three, four, seven, ten, twelve, and the like, but that is the number of persons who move upon the stage in this lesson. They were Joseph, Mary, Jesus, Simeon and Anna. And what splendid people they were. They were probably all humble in their origin, living in very moderate circumstances. But they got much out of life, and all of us would be glad to have our names associated with theirs. It was of their kind that the true Israel was made up. They were the backbone of the nation. Their lives were a living rebuke to that form of religion which was a sham because it was a mere name. In their community they must have been a savor of life unto life.

Danneker, the German sculptor, after spending eight years on the face of Christ, was asked to work on a statue of Venus. He replied, "After gazing so long on the face of Christ, think you that I can turn my attention to a heathen goddess?" Venus had no charms after the vision of Christ. Neither have the gods of this world ought to satisfy the soul of him who, by gazing on the face of the Saviour, has learned to love Him.—*W. Bullock.*

RIGHTEOUS AND DEVOUT

That is a good combination. The old version has it just and devout, or upright and devout. I guess it means just toward men and devout toward God. Our religion must be both vertical and horizontal. It must reach upward and outward. It has a manward and a Godward side. That was the kind of religion Simeon had. He did not open his hands for the blessing of the Lord when he went into the Temple, and then close them in a miserly manner when he moved among men. He tuned his life to his prayers. His conduct took on the color of his worship. In the Temple and out of the Temple were not two separate and distinct worlds with him; they were two parts of one and the same world. Devoutness slumps down into sleepy formality when justice toward others ceases to be a co-ordinate attribute.

THE HEART'S DESIRE

It is worth while to live to see some prayer answered or dream realized. Simeon had one desire to which he made all else subordinate. He longed to see Christ. He stood like a faithful sentinel upon the wall, watching for the coming of the morning star. He waited and prayed for Him who alone could heal the hurt of His people. His waiting was rewarded, for suddenly Christ appeared in His Temple, borne in the arms of an overjoyed mother; and the aged saint, bent with age, saw the desire of all nations before his eyes, and his reverent soul was swept with ecstasies beside which earth-born joys are empty. Some were seeking gold, others applause, and still others pleasure; but he was seeking Jesus, and he found Him. God's best gift had fallen into his arms, and it was enough.

A high-class Brahman had applied for baptism at the hands of a Christian minister. As he stood before the font he wore upon him a thread which was the symbol of his former faith, and which entitled him almost to worship from the lower caste. When the question was read which required for an answer, "I renounce them all," he tore the thread of pre-eminence from his person and trampled it under his feet. He had found greater distinction in becoming a follower of Jesus.

THE OFFICES OF JESUS

Simeon spoke of the work of Jesus under three phases. 1. *Thy salvation.* The salvation of the world which God had projected from eternity Jesus effected by His incarnation. What He does for the world

pales into insignificance if we remove all that is included under the term salvation. There is salvation in none other. He alone is our Saviour. How often the changes are rung on this thought! 2. *A light.* The earth would be like eternal night without the sun; so would the race of men be without Christ, the light of the world. Even in our highest wisdom, which is not very high in this realm, we cannot find God; we grope in darkness. One of the most beautiful as well as expressive symbols used by Jesus to give us an idea of His work in our behalf is that of light. 3. *The glory.* The greatest glory that Israel has ever known, or ever will know, is to be seen in its giving Jesus to the world. The greatest glory any nation will ever know will be in its acceptance of Jesus as Saviour and Lord. The one supreme boast that any of us can ever make will be the personal acknowledgment of His right to rule over our hearts. Jesus came to bring shame to none, but glory to all.

THE INCLUSION OF THE GENTILES

Simeon showed himself a true prophet of the Lord when he looked beyond the boundaries of his own people and saw the Gospel moving on its conquering way among the Gentiles. He displayed a vision that not many of his race possessed. If the Gentiles were then in darkness, and they were, they were not always to remain in that state. How true Simeon's conception of the place of Jesus in history was is abundantly known to us today. Had the Jews in the beginning of the Christian dispensation been half as wise as they thought they were, they would have seen that the only way to preserve their place among the nations was to make Jesus a light to the Gentiles.

FOR THE FALLING AND RISING

There was no way known to God whereby Christ could bring about the salvation of man without making it possible at the same time for those who rejected Him to fall into the deeper sin and condemnation. Rising with Him into the larger light and privilege is not the only alternative set before us. He came to send peace, but His coming has also sent the sword. He came to heal broken hearts, but many hearts have also been pierced by His coming. The majesty of the human will places within the hand of every one of us the possibility of choosing the broad way that leads to death. But to him that willeth to do His will there will come the certainty of the knowledge of that truth which can make wise unto salvation. There is a high way and there is a low way.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

From what book is our next lesson taken? Who wrote it? Why do we turn aside at this time from our character studies? What are we to understand by Christian freedom? How are we to regard this freedom? What are some of the ways in which we may fail to observe the law of self-control? Be prepared to illustrate from some life situation with which you are familiar the evil effects of intemperance. What is the secret of self-control? Is prohibition a good thing? How many go about making it effective?

WORLD'S TEMPERANCE SUNDAY: SPIRITUAL WEAPONS IN A WORLD WAR

Lesson IV
October 26

NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LESSON TEXT: Galatians 5: 13-26

(American Standard Revision Text)

13. For ye, brethren, were called for freedom; only *use* not your freedom for an occasion to the flesh, but through love be servants one to another.

14. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, *even* in this: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

15. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.

16. But I say, Walk by the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.

17. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are contrary the one to the other; that ye may not do the things that ye would.

18. But if ye are led by the Spirit, ye are not under the law.

19. Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are *these*: fornication,

uncleanness, lasciviousness,

20. idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousies, wraths, factions, divisions, parties,

21. envyings, drunkenness, revellings, and such like; of which I forewarn you, even as I did forewarn you, that they who practise such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

22. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

23. meekness, self-control; against such there is no law.

24. And they that are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts thereof.

25. If we live by the Spirit, by the Spirit let us also walk.

26. Let us not become vainglorious, provoking one another, envying one another.

GOLDEN TEXT: And every man that striveth in the games exerciseth self-control in all things.—I Cor. 9: 25.

LESSON GOAL: To arrive at a right understanding of the Christian view of self-control so that we may realize what is best for ourselves and for society.

LESSON PLAN

- I. THE LAW OF LOVE. (Vs. 13-15.)
- II. TWO WAYS OF WALKING. (Vs. 16-18.)
- III. THE WORKS OF THE FLESH. (Vs. 19-21.)
- IV. THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT. (Vs. 22-26.)

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

Verse 13: *Ye have been called unto liberty*.—The early Hebrews lived for centuries under an almost pure democracy, the entire Hebrew commonwealth being a great humane society. But at the time of the founding of the Roman Empire slaves formed the larger part of the population.

Wholesale slave dealers always followed the victorious army on the battlefield and purchased, for small amounts, the prisoners taken captive. These were sold at public auction.

Some slaves held positions of trust, but the majority of them were forced to give their lives to drudgery in the quarries or on landed estates, working in chain gangs by day and sleeping in dungeons by night, and all this without any remuneration.

One great uprising lasted for two years and cost the Roman army 100,000 lives.

Verse 20: *Idolatry*.—The Jews had no form of idolatry peculiar to themselves, but imitated foreigners in the cult and superstitions peculiar to the worship of pagan deities.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

Paul's letter to the Galatians falls into three almost equal parts. The first part includes chapters one and two, and deals with personal matters, such as Paul's Gospel, life and authority. The second part includes chapters three and four, and deals with the apostle's doctrine of justification by faith as over against the merit of good works. And the third part includes chapters five and six, and deals with practical matters, such as freedom, love, spiritual guidance, helpfulness, a holy walk and conversation. Our lesson is taken from the last part.

If we take the time to read the entire letter we shall find it a rather severe document. It was the apostle's custom to open his letters with a word of commendation, or a prayer of thanksgiving, or both; but such was not the case here. He had no word of praise for the Galatian Christians. They needed different handling.

The situation he had to face is clearly set forth in the letter itself. There was a group of people known as Judaizers, or Jewish Christians, who made him a lot of trouble. They would follow him and seek to undo his work. Now they accepted the Gospel and believed on Jesus; but they were not satisfied with that. They taught also that Gentile converts should accept the Old Testament law as an integral part of their faith; which meant that they should keep the Jewish Sabbath, and observe circumcision and the rules of ceremonial purity generally. Now Paul taught no such thing. He believed that when a man accepted Jesus as his Saviour he was set free from the legalism of the Old Testament.

But some people got the impression that what Paul taught was that the Christian was free to do just about as he pleased, that he became a law unto himself. We are to see in this lesson that Paul believed in law, but it was the law of love, and of loyalty to Christ; and that the Christian is indeed a free man, but at the same time he is the servant of all.

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

THE LAW OF LOVE

Vs. 13-15. The effect of the work of the Judaizers who had come to Galatia was to undo the labors of Paul and to pull the native converts back into legal bondage. To that extent the atonement of Christ had been nullified, and the deeds of the old law made of equal worth. And the apostle issued a clarion call to his converts saying, "Remember, brothers, the call came to you to give you freedom." He insisted that submission to ordinances of any kind, no matter who preached that doctrine, was not from Christ whom they had received when the Gospel first came to them.

But immediately he proceeded to inform them that Christian freedom was not to be interpreted to mean license to practice self-indulgence. They were not to live unto themselves; instead they were so to fill their hearts with love that they would become the servants of others. Freedom has two sides to it. There is the freedom to use and to indulge; which a person may do without detriment to himself. But

there is the freedom to refrain, to subdue one's appetite, to bring one's whole nature under the control of the higher law. We live in a society in which the conduct of each individual is to be determined in the light of what is best for all.

Over and over Jesus declared that the greatest of all laws, the law that embraces all other laws, is love, and that without it there is no possibility of pleasing God or of living usefully in the world. It seems that when these Judaizers came in, strife and contention sprang up, and the general condition prevailing in the church there was anything but lovely. When Paul spoke of biting and devouring one another, he used words that referred to the savagery of wild beasts. And as he viewed the situation from the outside he could only see the destruction of the congregation through bitter controversies.

TWO WAYS OF WALKING

Vs. 16-18. Paul was fond of calling the Christian religion the *way*, and it was very natural that he should speak of the Christian life as the *walk*. We are to walk in the way, accepting with a full and hearty faith the life brought to us through Christ, and manifesting it in our conduct. If there is one thing to be said of the Christian it is that he lives. He lives by the power of the Spirit. He does not stand still; he makes progress. But he cannot make progress unless he is led by the Spirit of God. And there is no other way by which he can keep from fulfilling the lusts of the flesh.

There is a war going on continually in these members of ours. It is the war between the Spirit and the flesh; and by flesh we are not to understand this physical body, but the whole sinful nature, and the tendency to do evil. We are conscious of the upward and downward pull. Paul once wrote, "When I would do good evil is present with me." That is the experience of all of us, but of some more than others. The cravings of our earthly nature are in sharp contrast with the strivings of the Spirit. The human soul is the battleground of the world's mightiest forces.

There is one and only one way of overcoming, and that is by being led by the Holy Spirit. Then we are not under the law, not in the power of the law. Now the law condemns. It shows us our sin, and the penalty of sin. By it we see the wrath of God. But the power of sin is broken, and its penalty removed through Christ our Saviour, whose salvation is applied to our hearts by the Spirit.

THE WORKS OF THE FLESH

Vs. 19-21. Paul starts out with this list of shameless evils resulting from personal abandonment by telling us that they are manifest; that is, they are in full view; you may see them if you will look about you. There is no way of hiding them, and for the most part those practicing them are not very anxious to conceal them. It may be doubted if the

apostle had any thought of classifying them, or of arranging them in groups. He heaps up words to name this catalogue of vices, and between some of them there exist only shades of difference. Still it would not be easy to add to the list. He names fifteen of them and then concludes with "and such like." In the list there are personal sins and social sins, sins of the body, of the mind and of the soul. The entire being is involved. Paul lived in a world in which he could see the revolting deeds of paganism. And to make matters worse some of them flourished under cover of the temples devoted to idol worship. But boasting does not become us who live in Christian lands. We have a long way to go to make the mind of Jesus dominant in this country. Paul ends this section of the letter by repeating his warning to his readers that whosoever practices these sins cannot inherit the kingdom of God.

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Vs. 22-26. What exhibit have we of the fruit of the Spirit? Happily the apostle names this last. He would have this list linger in the minds of his converts. He desires to hold it up as the altogether pleasing goal of living. For who can read these nine virtues without feeling their charm and consenting to their wholly lovely and challenging character?

Here we might attempt a classification. The first three, love, joy and peace, are general Christian qualities. The next four, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, are the qualities the Christian manifests toward his fellowmen. And the last two, meekness and self-control, are principles governing the Christian's conduct.

The law cannot condemn these virtues. It has no power in the presence of them. It cannot produce them, and it cannot prohibit them. And it has no power over the man whose life is lived in the demonstration of the Spirit.

One thing is sure, if we belong to Christ we have crucified the flesh. We do not live as those who are controlled by their appetites and lusts. The life we live is by the Spirit, and the life we live is the fruit of the Spirit. Resemblances to the world are becoming less and less, and those to Christ more and more.

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

THE WRITTEN LAW

Perhaps a good start could be made by reading the list of the works of darkness as found in verses 19-21. So far as you know, how many of them are prohibited by the laws of the nation or of the states? Even if there are statutes against them, to what extent are they able to control the vices that are here recorded? You will probably come to the conclusion after a little thought that whatever laws may have been enacted by a free people they cannot be expected to go very far toward stamping out the sins that are most commonly practiced by this nation. If we entertained no other hope for the redemption of society than that

which arises from the laws of the land in which we live we would be in utter despair. No sane person would desire the repeal of those laws, for they bring us a measure of protection; but there must be something that goes deeper than any external legislation if we are ever to produce a righteous social order.

LIBERTY

There are certain words of which we are justly proud. One of them is liberty, or freedom. We love to see it in print. We love to hear it spoken. We speak of its merits to our children. Perhaps most wars have been fought in the name of freedom. If a man should inscribe that word on a banner and march down the street with it, he would soon have a considerable following. Let a candidate write it into his platform and he will get votes. There is sweetness in the word. It has a charm we cannot resist. There can be no progress where there is no freedom. It is contrary to the deepest instinct of human nature to want to be the slave of anything or anybody. We desire to be free to go and to come, to think and to grow, to walk like men and to be our best selves. We believe that thereunto were we born.

LIBERTY AND LICENSE

There comes a time when we realize how close together are liberty and license. The border line between them is sometimes almost imperceptible. I may be enjoying my freedom today, but were I to go a step further I would plunge into license. Liberty is one part of the heritage Christ won for us. We are no longer under the law. But we must of necessity see that liberty has its limits. There are certain things the Christian cannot indulge in. He dare not do just as he pleases. The life he once lived is for ever a thing of the past. Self-indulgence belongs to the realm he has once for all abandoned. Our liberty becomes license when we use it to gratify our own desires to the injury of ourselves or our fellowmen.

THE ROYAL LAW OF LOVE

Paul never failed to write at the heart of his creed the law that works by love. A person may be any sort of legalist he pleases if he is always and everywhere actuated by the principle of love. If he thinks of his own good and the good of his fellows at the same time he cannot wander far from the right path. That was the stand Jesus took. He saw this principle pulsating in all right conduct. He saw all wrong conduct as devoid of it. The supreme characteristic of our Lord is His love. How can we do that which will injure another if we love him as we should?

WRONG DOING AS SLAVERY

The belief that sin is slavery is common in all literature. It is found to permeate the classics. The Stoics declared that "The wise man

alone is free." So many people begin with the feeling that freedom is synonymous with doing what they please, only to end with the experience that it is the road to abject slavery. And when a man goes about boasting that he is free, and that he does what he likes, he means that he is catering to the appetites of his lower nature. He soon wakes up to the fact that the premise with which he began was false through and through.

"There is a life going on in certain circles in this city which veils itself under social proprieties and elegancies, but which is aptly described by the term 'fast.' It is undermining some of the brightest youthful promise, and blighting some of the best young manhood and womanhood of this city. Do you know what the end of that will be? Some of you have seen Couture's great picture, 'The Decadence of the Romans,' in the gallery of the Luxembourg at Paris—a picture of a luxurious hall, where a frenzied orgy is at its height, a carnival of drunkenness and wantonness. A drunken youth, with a wreath in his tangled hair, sits upon a pedestal, while a reeling boy proffers a dripping goblet to the marble mouth of a statue. The old Roman dignity is gone from the brutalized faces of the revellers, which contrast sadly with the noble features of the old Roman worthies ranged round the hall, and with the sad faces of a group of thoughtful-looking men who are quitting the scene. It is a truth that has been told over and over again, as one city after another—Antioch, Corinth, Rome, Sybaris—have gone over the precipice. It is the story of the inevitable end of fast life and of fast society."—*M. R. Vincent.*

THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT

But there is hope. There is a way out. We are not left to grope in darkness and at last sink into the pit of helplessness and hopelessness. If we walk by the Spirit we shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh. The result may not be an immediately complete and full-orbed victory. The battle will still be on. But there will be a progressive overcoming of the powers that make for slavery, and a progressive increase of true Christian freedom. What we need do is to surrender our lives to Christ and to the control of His Spirit. How true it is that "God is something more than a command that we must obey; He is a Life that we may share; He is a Spirit that will come into our hearts." That good life we seek to achieve is not impossible. It may be ours through walking by the Spirit.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

What had been Peter's occupation before he became a disciple of Jesus? What qualities had he that made him the foremost of the twelve apostles? In what words did he make a noble confession of his Lord? What tragedy did Jesus foretell would come into this man's life? What were the steps that led to his downfall? How did he deny his Lord? When, where, and how was he restored to his former place of responsibility?

SIMON PETER: FROM WEAKNESS TO STRENGTH

TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LESSON TEXT: Mark 8: 27-29; Luke 22: 31-34; John 18: 25-27; 21: 15-17.

(American Standard Revision Text)

Mark 8: 27 And Jesus went forth, and his disciples, into the villages of Cæsarea Philippi: and on the way he asked his disciples, saying unto them, Who do men say that I am?

28. And they told him, saying, John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but others, One of the prophets.

29. And he asked them, But who say ye that I am? Peter answereth and saith unto him, Thou art the Christ.

Luke 22: 31. Simon, Simon, behold, Satan asked to have you, that he might sift you as wheat:

32. but I made supplication for thee, that thy faith fail not; and do thou, when once thou hast turned again, establish thy brethren.

33. And he said unto him, Lord, with thee I am ready to go both to prison and to death.

34. And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, until thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me.

John 18: 25. Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They said therefore unto him, Art thou also

one of his disciples? He denied, and said, I am not.

26. One of the servants of the high priest, being a kinsman of him whose ear Peter cut off, saith, Did not I see thee in the garden with him?

27. Peter therefore denied again: and straightway the cock crew.

21: 15. So when they had broken their fast, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs.

16. He saith to him again a second time, Simon, son of John, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Tend my sheep.

17. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of John, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

GOLDEN TEXT: Now when they beheld the boldness of Peter and John, and had perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled; and took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.—Acts 4: 13.

LESSON GOAL: To teach that weakness through trusting self may be changed into strength through trusting Christ.

LESSON PLAN

I. PETER'S CONFESSION OF CHRIST. (Mark 8: 27-29.)

II. PETER'S DENIALS OF CHRIST.

1. The Denials Foretold. (Luke 22: 31-34.)

2. The Three Denials. (John 18: 25-27.)

III. PETER'S TEST AND COMMISSION. (John 21: 15-17.)

1. The Searching Questions.

2. The Satisfying Answers.

3. The Serving Love.

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

Luke 22: 31. *Sift you as wheat.*—By tossing the grain and chaff together into the air, after it had been trodden by cattle on the outdoor

threshing floor, the wheat would remain and the chaff be blown away. The meaning here is that Satan was demanding a chance to separate Peter from Christ, as had happened to Judas, or that he wanted to show up Peter's weaknesses. In Syria and Palestine the ancient method of separating grain from chaff is still used. The word for "sift" occurs nowhere else in the New Testament.

Verse 34. *The cock shall not crow.*—The Oriental believed that the cock crew three times each night, at nine, at midnight and at three in the morning, thus marking the night watches. The chickens were kept under the floor of the house or near by; the crowing was conveniently heard.

John 18:25. *Standing and warming himself*—Cold nights in April are common in Jerusalem, owing to the high altitude. The houses of the rich are built around an open court. The fire of coals was a "brazier of charcoal." Around this the servants gathered and stood to warm themselves. Partly to warm himself and partly to escape notice Peter stood with the servants.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

Jesus was seeking quiet so that He might give His apostles special instruction. He took them to the north of Galilee into Cæsarea Philippi, so called to distinguish it from Cæsarea on the Mediterranean. This was in the tetrarchy of Philip. The people were chiefly Gentile, though many Jews were here and there. Jesus sought to test out the effect of His teaching, especially on His disciples. It was near the end of the Galilean ministry and His followers ought to have definite convictions concerning Him. Peter announced their views about Him in contrast with the popular explanations of Him.

The Thursday before the crucifixion had arrived. Following the last supper Jesus talked with His apostles for the last time. He warned them of the fate awaiting Him. Peter made his bold assertion of unshakable loyalty and received the cutting prediction that he would deny his Lord. The denials occurred in the high priest's house following the betrayal and arrest of Jesus. This was probably after midnight.

The crucifixion and resurrection were both proven facts when the seven apostles at Peter's suggestion resumed their fishing in the sea of Galilee. They had an unsuccessful night. At dawn Jesus came and directed their fishing so that they caught a multitude of fishes. The personal testing of Peter followed.

THE TEXT INTERPPETED

The transformation of Simon Peter was gradual. There is no point in his life of association with Christ at which he makes a sudden and complete change so that before that time he could be called weak and following it strong. In fact there was a rise and fall procedure with him almost until Pentecost. At times he springs toward the ideal but retains his position too uncertainly. Again he goes back into the condemnatory ways of his natural traits but, fortunately he was always helped back to the better standing before Christ and men. The few events of Peter's life chosen for this lesson are sufficient to give us an illustration of how a life that has the weakness of self-trust may get rid of that weakness and grow strong as trust in Christ increases.

SIMON PETER: FROM WEAKNESS TO
STRENGTHLesson V
November 2

PETER'S CONFESSION OF CHRIST (Mark 8: 27-29)

This is a sudden rise to the heights of a strong man of courageous faith. In a quest for privacy Jesus had gone with His disciples to Caesarea Philippi. He had a hard lesson for them to learn, the truth about His suffering and death. He sought freedom from interruption, such as was constantly His where He was a heralded miracle worker.

They were making headway as travelers. Jesus was more concerned about the progress His disciples were making in reaching a clarified realization of Him as the Christ. Many opinions were held by the populace, some mere rumors, some personal deductions, and others speculations and attempted explanations. Jesus must have known that there was no real understanding of Him as the Messiah. Using this indefiniteness as a basis for a question Jesus planned to bring His disciples to a definite and correct thought about Him. He knew that His disciples in associating with the people would hear their comments. He did not want any false statements about Him to interfere with the progress of His instruction. The best way to bring the matter to a head was to get the disciples to talking about what the people were saying. Hence His question, "Who do men say that I am?" The reply indicated a partial truth about Him but by a direct question Jesus demanded their own judgment of Him and it was Peter who answered. To him Jesus was the Christ of God. In so declaring himself he was expressing the views of the disciples. By this confession of his conviction Peter committed himself to this truth, which was to be kept secret temporarily.

Greater truth about Jesus never was spoken. All that type, symbol, and prophecy had forecast was included in Peter's confession. The Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God were the highest titles man could give to Jesus. Peter reached strength of conviction and spoke out the truth he believed. He did it not out of mental calculation, or personal appreciation, but by the Spirit's guidance.

PETER'S DENIALS OF CHRIST

Two questions are often asked to test a child's information about the Bible. One is "Who betrayed Christ?" and the other, "Who denied Christ?" It is by these questions that Judas and Peter are best known by many people. It was his strange failure to live up to his boasting promises and to his noble confession that is involved in Peter's denials of Christ. He had not the courage to stand firm. He yielded to fear and resorted to lies. He made himself a man trying to save himself from the ridicule and possible physical dangers which identification with Christ might entail. He was no longer the pledged defender of Jesus; that pledge he disregarded. He was a weaker man under crisis than we could expect Peter to be. But Jesus knew Peter's weakness and tried to warn him against it. He anticipated the tests before him and tried to prepare him for them. So we have an account of *the denials foretold* (Luke 22: 31-34).

It was by his old name, Simon, Jesus addressed him, warning him of the severe test before him. Satan had asked to have him for testing, as he had long before asked for Job. Under such testing Judas had fallen. Peter's prominence and boastfulness made him a particular object of Satan's plans. But, although facing this test, Peter is assured that Jesus has prayed for him that his faith shall not completely and finally fail. He would fall, as Jesus indicated in speaking of his turning again. But there would yet be work for him in strengthening the faith of others. Peter could not understand his weakness; he saw only his strength and boasted about it. Pride was in his heart and on his lips, but Jesus knew Peter better than he knew himself. "I tell thee"—that was authoritative foresight. The shock of Jesus' words about the three denials should have put Peter on guard.

The story of *the three denials* (John 18:17, 25-27) marks the climax of Peter's weakness. It seems impossible that he should so soon forget his loud boast of unshakable loyalty. But he was just natural, very human, controlled by immediate circumstances. His trust in Christ was laid aside temporarily; trust in self was his refuge and it exposed him to attack and he fell in shame.

PETER'S TEST AND COMMISSION (John 21:15-17)

Against the background of the fishing expedition that failed, though planned and manned by skilled fishermen, stands the resurrected Christ directing them to success and calling them to eat food. Jesus centered His concern on Peter. He forgave his denials. Peter's faith had not entirely forsaken Him. He could repent and weep over his sins. He pulled himself together by God's help and was again leading the apostles. But Peter needed testing by Jesus. Satan had sifted him and almost ruined his prospect for being of worth to Jesus. Jesus would test him to show Peter what was expected of him, and how He trusted him.

The searching questions of Jesus to Peter were three. They stress Peter's frailty by addressing him as Simon son of John, a man, an erstwhile boasting but weak man. They revolve on the great center, love for Christ. (Two words for love were used; one meaning love of selection, a love that chooses one out of many; the other means love of affection, a love such as for kin, for friends. The former is the greater in meaning; it is used in speaking of God's love.) Twice Jesus said, "Lovest thou me?" using the greater word—"Have you chosen Me above all else? Will you stand for Me now?" Peter could not trust himself to use that word but declared that he had the other kind of love, the love of affection. The third time Jesus used the lesser word, as though to test the reality of Peter's affection. It was bringing the whole matter to a lower level for Peter's sake, but not too low for Peter to be used in Christ's service. Because of the three denials, it has been supposed that Jesus asked His question three times and that it was this fact that grieved Peter. Probably a better explanation of his grief is that in the third question Jesus used the word for love which Peter

employed, as though questioning whether Peter had even the love of affection for Him.

It must be said that *the satisfying answers* of Peter were used by Jesus as a justification for commissioning Peter to the honored position of serving as a pastor, tending and feeling the little lambs and the flock, a Christian minister caring for children and adults. Jesus judged Peter strong enough in faith and love to entrust him with the pastoral office.

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING SOURCE OF SPECIAL STRENGTH

In thinking of Simon Peter in terms of his strength and weakness the deduction is clear that when he was strong it was by special help from God. His natural trend was weakness. When he rose to the distinguished height of the great confession, Jesus cautioned him against crediting himself for his exceptional insight into who Christ is. He had not spoken from his own thinking. His words had been given him by the Father. In exalting Peter for this fine and comprehensive statement about Christ, we take nothing from his nobleness by saying the source of his strength and insight was God.

Men and women who rise highest in their conceptions of God, who understand Jesus best, whose religion is most ideal are the results of what God does for them. Strength of Christian character is the outflow of Christ through the individual. Dr. Joseph Parker, eloquent, persuasive, spiritual preacher of England, owed his penetration of the profound things of God to his much communion with Christ.

ABLE TO KNOW CHRIST

There is a depth of mystery about Jesus Christ which people of His day could not fathom. They speculated about Him and tried to explain Him by saying He was this and that. Even His disciples were slow to know Him understandingly. Peter knew Him by divine help.

There are speculators about Christ today. They are analyzing His words and cataloging His deeds. They are contrasting His life with ancient holy men and comparing Him with modern ideals. They submit Him to ordinary measurement. With what result? At best they find Him a high type man, a skilled teacher, a faultless citizen. His words are only moral guides and His works are exemplary, though the record of them is highly colored and imaginative. But, thank God, there are many today who are able to know Him as the Christ of God, because they accept divine guidance in seeking to understand Him.

OUR WEAKNESS WELL KNOWN

Peter was a leader of the disciples. His words, quickly spoken with positiveness, were courageous, at times boastful. He seemed very strong in mind, in assurance, in conviction. But Jesus knew his weakness and warned him against it when this procedure was best for him.

It is not so much what we make people think of us, but what Christ knows about us that counts. We may study to show ourselves approved before men, and fail to have God's approval. Our loud words may issue from a hollow life. When we boast most our bravery may be least. Behind a big gun there is often a trembling coward. It is not wise to parade our weaknesses before men or hide them from God.

NOT AS LOYAL AS WE THINK

Three times Peter's loyalty to Jesus failed under test. Grant his sincerity in pledging loyalty to Jesus, when all others might forsake him. Did his thinking rate his loyalty too high? He crumpled up before the questions of maids and men and disgraced his sturdily asserted loyalty. He was not as loyal as he thought he was.

Most of us are like that when tests come. We vow allegiance when there are no dangers. We pledge loyalty to Christ and the Church when there is a crowd of Christians around us. We do it sincerely. But we are timid souls when to be loyal calls for standing alone or facing a danger. Often we are like barking dogs in the master's yard with the gate shut, bold and ferocious in making noise, but running to cover when no fence protects. It is so easy to think ourselves stronger and bolder than we really are. A few severe tests expose our weakness.

TESTED FOR STRENGTH

Peter was a strange mixture of strength and weakness. His weakness he displayed when he acted naturally. Jesus wanted his strength to be a reality to him, something he knew could be trusted. So Jesus tested him to find his strength and bring it to the surface. His three questions about Peter's love for Him were to give Peter a better understanding of himself. Peter's loyalty had not stood firm under trial. Jesus put him to a test to show him that loyalty is dependent on deep love. If he loved Jesus supremely, he could serve Him loyally. While he based his anticipated loyalty on his own boasted strength he could not be trusted by Jesus. All men know how true this is. Loyalty that supports its claims by deed must be grounded in love.

TRUSTED TO SERVE

Love was the background of Jesus' ministry; love is its explanation. How else while we were yet sinners could He have died for us? How else could He have lived His life unselfishly with and for sinners? Peter must have known how Jesus' work was linked with His love. He must have seen what Jesus meant by waiting for his avowal of love before assigning him service, a pastoral relation to the people. Service is best where love is truest. Where love is service follows.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

Read the Bible references and enough of the context to get their setting. Who was Thomas? Why did he propose returning to Jerusalem with Jesus? Why did he ask Jesus about the way He was going? Was he sincere in not believing?

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LESSON TEXT: John 11:14-16; 14:5-7; 20:24-29; 21:1, 2.

(American Standard Revision Text)

11:14. Then Jesus therefore said unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead.

15. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him.

16. Thomas therefore, who is called Didymus, said unto his fellow-disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him.

14:5. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; how know we the way?

6. Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no one cometh unto the Father, but by me.

7. If ye had known me, ye would have known my Father also: from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him.

20:24. But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.

25. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the

nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.

26. And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them. Jesus cometh, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you.

27. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and see my hands; and reach *hither* thy hand, and put it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.

28. Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.

29. Jesus saith unto him, Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed *are* they that have not seen, and *yet* have believed.

21:1. After these things Jesus manifested himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and he manifested *himself* on this wise.

2. There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the *sons* of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples.

GOLDEN TEXT: Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.—John 20:28.

LESSON GOAL: To teach that the rise to complete belief in Jesus Christ may be slow and arduous but that where there is sincere openmindedness the goal will be reached.

LESSON PLAN

- I. THE HEROIC APOSTLE. (John 11:14-16.)
- II. THE KNOWLEDGE-SEEKING APOSTLE. (14:5-7.)
- III. THE PROOF-DEMANDING APOSTLE. (20:24, 25.)
- IV. THE CONVINCED APOSTLE. (20:26-29; 21:1, 2.)

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

John 11:16: *Thomas called Didymus*.—The word "Didymus" is peculiar to John's Gospel. It was not a surname of Thomas but the Greek equivalent of the Aramaic name, both words meaning "twin" or "double." Didymus would be the more familiar name to use in Asia Minor.

14:6: *Life*.—In the New Testament two words are used for life, *zoa* and *bios*. The former is used here and signifies life in its principle and includes all living, as opposed to dead, things. It is used for

spiritual and immortal life. It is a favorite word with John. The latter signifies the period, means or manner of existence, as referred chiefly to man. So we have zoology as a study of all life and biography as a story of a man's life.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

The record of Thomas is confined to John's Gospel, except that he is named elsewhere in the list of disciples. He has no prominence in the record until near the close of Jesus' life.

Jesus had withdrawn from Jerusalem to escape the fury of the Jews who gathered around Him at "the feast of the dedication at Jerusalem" and demanded a plain acknowledgment of His being the Christ, if it was really true. His reply was regarded as blasphemy and effort was made to stone Him. He went across the Jordan into Perea and continued His ministry. While there word came of the sickness of Lazarus of Bethany. Jesus waited two days before deciding to return to Judæa. This was to run into danger and death. It was Thomas who set the example of loyalty by proposing that they go with Jesus to die with Him.

The next reference to Thomas tells of his question to Jesus in the upper room where the last Passover had been celebrated and the Lord's Supper had been instituted. It was the question that evoked the assuring words of Jesus, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life."

The other statements about Thomas show his attitude concerning the resurrection. He failed to be with the other disciples when Jesus entered the room where they were. A week later Thomas was present and received proof concerning Jesus and uttered his great confession, "My Lord and my God." He was one of the seven who went fishing at Peter's suggestion and was privileged to receive the added proof of the fact of the resurrection.

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

The meager record of Thomas as given by John tells nothing of his call into discipleship. However from the words he spoke something of the character of the man can be deduced. There have been many derogatory statements made concerning "Thomas the doubter" and he has been held up as unworthy, but when the facts are examined the conclusion must be that Thomas was a noble man, always open-minded, rather deliberate in reaching decisions, insisting that he have a sure basis for his faith, and ready to take a stand and make an expression of his convictions, firmly and fearlessly, as soon as he was reasonably certain.

THE HEROIC APOSTLE

John 11:14-16. Jesus had crossed the Jordan into Peræa and was ministering to the people there. There grew up among these an assurance that Jesus fulfilled all that John the Baptist had spoken about Him. Many became believers in Peræa.

In the meantime Lazarus of Bethany was sick unto death, and word was sent to Jesus about him by his sisters. Jesus waited two days and Lazarus died. His announcement that He was going back to Judæa was unwelcome to the disciples for they knew that His life and theirs would be in danger there. It was to escape the anger and threatening violence of the Jews that they had sought this place of safety in Peræa.

Jesus manifested determination to return and risk the dangers. He gave as His reason the death of Lazarus and the fact that something in connection with His absence when Lazarus died would strengthen their faith. He intended to go to Lazarus.

But the disciples had argued against their going. They feared the stoning that threatened them in Jerusalem. They had not the courage to step forth as one man and declare their willingness to accompany Him. Peter had been impetuous in declaring his loyalty to Jesus. John and James belonged to the "inner circle." But it was not these who volunteered to go with Jesus.

Thomas had not become prominent through demonstrative fidelity to Jesus. He faced the facts without illusion. He saw the dangers as did the others. He was the one who broke the silence that followed Jesus' announcement with the avowed purpose of going back with Jesus and added, "that we may die with him." The crisis brought the heroic in Thomas to the surface and impelled action. His head was clear on the matter; he was not deluded by thoughts of mysterious protection. His heart was brave; he followed the example of no others—he became their example. It was his loyalty, even unto death, that silenced the others and they all went back with Jesus, led on by Him and the heroic Thomas.

THE KNOWLEDGE-SEEKING APOSTLE (14:5-7)

Jesus had been saying much about His going away from them and the disciples had listened passively. Peter had been bold to ask where He was going but was not answered except with the restrictive reply that he could not go along. Peter had declared his purpose of going with Jesus, though it would mean death, but had been denounced as the denier of Jesus.

Jesus began to talk about His Father's house and its mansions. He was going there to prepare for their coming. He made the sweeping claim that they knew where He was going and the way He was going. This was too much for Thomas. The others may have understood, but Thomas did not. If they did not understand, they were as silent as though they did. But Thomas was not that kind of a disciple. He sought fuller knowledge; he had a mind and used it to discover the facts back of the words. Jesus had said strange things, "Father's house," and "ye know the way." Thomas was not sure what Jesus was talking about and he certainly longed to be clear in this whole important matter. He planned to be wholly loyal; he intended to stand by Jesus. There was absolutely no pretence about him; he could not conceal his questionings, his wonderings, his doubtings. These must be removed and he would give Jesus a chance to remove them. He must see to the bottom of this strange statement by Jesus. He knew Jesus understood and he wanted to understand. He believed Jesus could help him; so he asked Him.

Thomas was not ashamed to say that he did not know. He was not even willing to let matters drift in the hope of finding out for himself.

He did not try to be smart, or show off, by questioning what Jesus had said. He laid the difficulty of his mind before Jesus; he was in quest of knowledge. Jesus understood him and treated his question as it deserved. He gave him the greater truth for his comfort and consideration, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life."

THE PROOF-DEMANDING APOSTLE (20:24, 25)

Only by inference can we guess why Thomas was absent when Jesus appeared to the disciples in the room when the doors were closed. The fact of his absence deprived him of what the others saw and heard. Their report was too good to be true. It was contrary to what Thomas had seen; he knew of the death and burial. Rumors were not enough for him. He wanted first hand information; the others might be deluded, mistaken. At any rate he demanded proof. The enthusiasm of others did not sweep him off of his feet. He did not deny that they had seen the Lord. He did not argue against the possibility of resurrection. All he asked was the same privilege they had experienced. He put it bluntly, demanding visible proof, the wounded body of Jesus. He could not believe on hearsay; he could not honestly say it any other way than "I will not believe." This was not stubbornness, or boasting. It was merely saying positively "I will not believe what I cannot believe." Thomas suffered in his hesitating, waiting, doubting more than the others. He was trying to struggle through. None was more eager to believe in the risen Lord than Thomas. Heroic to the point of facing death with Jesus, his loyalty never abated. He merely wanted the proof the others had.

THE CONVINCED APOSTLE (20:26-29; 21:1, 2)

A week passed—a dreadful week for Thomas. His anguished soul wondered and worried. Would he have a chance to know for himself that Jesus was alive? The proof came to him. He had done the right thing by staying with the other apostles. He was trying to find what they possessed, assurance that Jesus lived. Jesus came and singled out Thomas to give him a chance. Jesus did not despise his demanding proof; He was ready to give the proof. He offered the evidence of His reality to Thomas. He wanted him to be no longer without fulness of faith. Thomas saw what Jesus showed him. It was enough. His shackled faith burst forth in freedom and his words expressed all he felt and believed. He said what all the while he had wanted to say, but would not because he could not honestly.

He was convinced when he had the same proof the others had, but he outdid them all in his declared faith, "My Lord and my God . . ." Jesus blessed him, but blessed all others, too, whose faith does not demand such proofs. Thomas stayed with the apostles. He was with them when they went fishing and experienced a new, strange, satisfying proof of the resurrection.

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

COURAGEOUS DEVOTION

When there is a crisis, courage is required or devotion ceases. Patriotism runs high when drums beat and flags unfurl; under their spell devotion is fervid. When the call comes to risk life as a patriot sometimes must, only true courage forestalls the chilling of devotion. Devotion must be courageous, heroically so when occasion arises. Thomas met such an occasion with courage. His devotion to Jesus was more than fond looks and fine words; it was heroic support when the cost was incalculable.

"But if we are on the Lord's side He will wonderfully strengthen and deliver us. The golden-crested wren is one of the tiniest of birds; it is said to weigh only the fifth part of an ounce, and yet, on frailest pinions, it braves hurricanes and crosses northern seas. It often seems in nature as if Omnipotence worked best through frailest organisms; certainly the omnipotence of grace is seen to the greatest advantage in the trembling but resolute saint."—*Watkinson*.

UNDER MENTAL CONTROL

When we talk about cold-blooded intellectualism we do not mean that ignoring mental control is preferable. We want faith that reaches out and goes ahead confidently, but we want that faith to avoid the folly of grasping what tested knowledge says must not be touched. God does not expect us to have a blind faith. He expects us to see as far as we can and trust Him for the rest.

Thomas was under mental control. He had faith, true, earnest, sincere faith. But he wanted to know. He had every reason to ask to be shown before believing the resurrection. Others had this proof; he asked no more than that. His questioning mind demanded thoroughness. He could not be honest with himself by blandly believing the report of others. Of course he missed much by hesitating, but for men like Thomas there is no other course.

NOT ON HEARSAY MERELY

Here is a perplexing difficulty. Thomas would not believe what he was told even by his brethren who had seen the Lord. Are not all of us in the same relation to the facts about Jesus? Do we not have to take them as they are reported to us? We read the Gospels and accept Christ as our Saviour? It is a triumph of faith that is inexplicable. All we have is hearsay. We cannot test out these reports by actual contact with the body of our Lord. Doubtless this explains why some men refuse to believe; they cannot have a physical proof. But there is this difference. Thomas was under the severe strain of a terrible shock. He had adjusted himself to the fact of Jesus' death. He had not grasped the hope of the resurrection. The report was too good to believe, much as he longed for it to be true. Men are not restrained by any such shock today. They have the cumulative testimony of centuries about a living Christ. They have learned to believe on hearsay.

THE COST OF HINDERED FAITH

The hindering of Thomas' faith by his calculating mind proved costly to him. It is not far-stretched imagination to picture the suffering of Thomas during that long week of anxious uncertainty. Others were rejoicing in knowing the living Lord again. Oh, if he could know! His heart was crushed under the burden of not knowing. His faith wanted to believe, but he could not give faith free rein. Pity him or blame him, Thomas was doing the best he could and in the meantime he was suffering.

Who has not paid the high cost of hindered faith? Maybe it was a doubt about a friend, a question about an investment, a wonder about the justice of God's dealings. Faith wanted to be certain, but for the time it was held back.

A COMPLETE RESPONSE

But his heart conquered. Thomas struggled through. The sudden relief came when the sympathetic, unscolding, gracious Christ met the doubts of Thomas with a convincing proof. Jesus allowed Thomas the same chance that Peter and John and the others had enjoyed. It came to Thomas as a fresh revelation of the truth that His crucified Lord was indeed alive. Having seen he outreached the others in his confession. "My Lord and my God"—this was his complete response, complete in that his mind and his heart and his entire being went into it, complete in that it included a confession of the full divinity of Christ. The conflict between head and heart was ended and neither has done away with the other. Thomas has come to believe as he thinks and to think as he believes.

AN INTELLIGENT FAITH

Intelligent faith is the preventive of fanaticism. Paul did not think it belittled his faith to say, "I know whom I have believed." He exhorted Timothy to study. In fact the Bible exalts teaching as a means of establishing victorious faith. There may be too much stress laid on the teaching at times, but Jesus was a teacher and He sent forth His apostles, commissioned to teach. Thomas was a pupil of Jesus, perhaps a little tardy to grasp deep meanings. He had a rather slow, arduous advance into complete faith in the living Christ, but he was sincere and openminded. He insisted on an intelligent faith and he reached the goal, a thoroughly convinced, wholly satisfied believer in Christ.

Many of us may have difficulties and doubts about Christ. We are almost sure to have them if we think and try to understand. However we will avoid many a heartache if we do not hold back our faith until we know all mysteries. Luther said, "There are some things I must leave for God to know."

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

What was the office of a centurion? Why was one located at Capernaum? What type of man was he? What induced him to consult Jesus? Did the plea of the Jews influence Jesus to help the centurion? How was the servant healed? Why did the centurion's faith amaze Jesus?

THE BELIEVING CENTURION: A GEN-
TILE'S FAITH COMMENDED

Lesson VII
November 16

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 8: 5-13.

(American Standard Revision Text)

5. And when he was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him,

6. and saying, Lord, my servant lieth in the house sick of the palsy, grievously tormented.

7. And he saith unto him, I will come and heal him.

8. And the centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof; but only say the word, and my servant shall be healed.

9. For I also am a man under authority, having under myself soldiers: and I say to this one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he

doeth it.

10. And when Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.

11. And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven:

12. but the sons of the kingdom shall be cast forth into the outer darkness: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.

13. And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And the servant was healed in that hour.

GOLDEN TEXT: And they shall come from the east and west, and from the north and south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God.—Luke 13: 29.

LESSON GOAL: To show that faith in Christ is always commended and rewarded by Him.

LESSON PLAN

I. A FAITH LIMITED. (5-9.)

1. The Entreaty.
2. The Confidence.

II. A LESSON TAUGHT. (10-12.)

1. Jesus Astonished at Faith.
2. The Gentiles Welcomed.
3. The Woe of the Refused.

III. A PROMISE FULFILLED. (13.)

1. The Reward of Faith.
2. The Immediate Cure.

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

Verse 5: *A Centurion*.—Stationed at Capernaum was a company of Roman soldiers in the service of Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee. Nominally a hundred men were in the company and their captain was a centurion, a commander of a hundred. He was a non-commissioned officer and could not rise to a higher command.

Verse 11: *Shall sit down*.—This is our rendering of the word meaning recline. The figure is that of a banquet where the guests reclined on their left sides on couches at the table, having their right arms and hands free.

Verse 12: *Outer darkness*.—This is in contrast with the illuminated banquet hall. There were no street lights; this would make the darkness apparently more intense. The language is figurative and was often used to set forth the dire state of “the wicked in outer darkness.”

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

Since Jesus had made Capernaum His home, naturally the centurion would know about Him, His teachings and work. The fact that He was a miracle-maker was not kept in secret. In his official position the centurion probably had investigated the movements of Jesus. He was favorably known by the Jews; he had built a synagogue for them in Capernaum.

“The Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft, which was carrying on excavations in Egypt, Babylonia and Syria, undertook the investigation of ancient synagogues in Galilee and Jaulan. Among these they excavated the ruins of the synagogue at Tell Hum on the sea of Galilee, the probable site of Capernaum. Here they found the remains of a once beautiful synagogue which was probably built in the fourth century A. D. Beneath it is the floor of a still older building. This last is probably the synagogue in which so many of the incidents of the ministry of Christ in Capernaum took place, the one built by a Roman centurion.”—G. A. Barton.

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

The Roman centurions mentioned in the Bible were noble men, who were favorably disposed toward the Christ and the Christians. The centurion at the crucifixion saw more than an ordinary criminal in Jesus and bore witness, “Truly this was the Son of God.” Cornelius was brought to conversion by Peter; he was a devout man, fearing God, giving alms liberally and praying always to God. Julius showed great kindness to Paul. The centurion of Capernaum, whose servant Jesus healed, was liked by the Jews, because he loved their nation and built them a synagogue.

The two accounts of this miracle (Matt. 8: 5-13; Luke 7: 1-10) approach and describe the event differently. Matthew brings the centurion directly to Jesus with his request; Luke has him sending elders of the Jews to present his plea. But there is no conflict between the records. The two men told the story as they had it and used it to strengthen their purpose for writing.

A FAITH LIMITED (Vs. 5-9)

The centurion's servant was sorely afflicted with palsy and at the point of death. This servant was dear to him, one who was regarded as honorable by him. The report of Jesus' being in Capernaum suggested to the centurion that help would come from Jesus for his servant. But Jesus must be approached and *the entreaty* made to Him. The faith of the centurion necessarily was limited. What he knew of Jesus was by hearsay. He had a high regard for the Jews, their God and His worship. He must have been interested in Jesus; probably had seen Him in Capernaum.

Either he went to Jesus, or sent the Jewish elders. The important fact is that the case was brought to Jesus. It is strange that the Jewish elders would go to Jesus; it would be more likely that they would dis-

courage the centurion in giving Jesus such recognition. Probably this increases proof of the high regard the Jews had for the centurion; they would do his bidding, regardless of their own attitude toward Jesus. The elders added their praise for the worthiness of the centurion to urge Jesus to help him.

There is evidence that the centurion had reached a stage of faith in Jesus which gave him *the confidence* to ask him to save his servant. Jesus offered to go to the centurion's house to heal the servant. But He was met by a strange declaration of humility on the part of the centurion and of exaltation for Himself. Claiming himself unfit to receive Jesus into his house, he expressed a real conviction; it was not racial, or social prejudice; it was not pretense; it was not a salve for the Jews who might be offended if he received Jesus.

The centurion regarded Jesus as having authority over diseases. Diseases were considered evidences of an evil power in possession of a person. Jesus was looked to as having authority and power to drive out the evil. The centurion explained what he meant by referring to the obedience he received from those under his authority; when he commanded they did his bidding. If a Roman officer could do this, certainly the Son of God could do more. All Jesus needed to do was to "say the word and my servant shall be healed." This final expression of confidence struck Jesus as remarkable. To Him it was proof of great faith. It was a faith that in spite of unavoidable limitations was reaching as far as it could. Jesus would not let a faith like that go by unnoticed.

A LESSON TAUGHT (Vs. 10-12)

Jesus marveled at this centurion's faith. On other occasions He marveled at unbelief on the part of the Jews. It was remarkable that this Roman should put such trust in Jesus. Jesus turned from the centurion and his friends to teach the multitude, probably His disciples in particular, how the *Gentiles are welcomed* into the kingdom of God when they exercise faith.

Jesus showed that He was *astomished at faith*, when He found it unexpectedly. He paid tribute to the centurion's faith by contrasting it with what He had found in Israel; no Jew had risen to such submissive, expectant faith. It was as simple as a child's yet it was a faith that won Jesus' applause. This Roman had done better than any man of Israel; he had suddenly sprung into great faith without any background of religious training, such as the Jews had been given. He announced a truth that was both shocking and unwelcome to the Jews. It told that Gentiles would come from the east and the west, the range of the earth as then known, and share with the Jews in the privileges of the kingdom. (It was a long time before even His disciples could believe this.)

The woe of the refused sons of the kingdom, the Jews who by right ought to enter the kingdom willingly and gladly, was figuratively

described by Jesus. Outer darkness, weeping and gnashing of teeth, represented the ultimate anguish of those who had not the faith to accept Jesus as the Son of God. While the banquet, as the Jews conceived heaven to be, was progressing, some would be outside in the dark, or night, and would lament their fate.

A PROMISE FULFILLED (V. 13)

Jesus turned to the centurion with a direct assurance that he could go to his house and expect to find his servant cured. This was *the reward of faith* for which he had hoped. The miracle of healing was directly linked with the faith of the centurion. Jesus did not refer to His authority or power, as might have been expected in view of what the centurion had said. His chief concern was to emphasize faith as the key which unlocks the storehouse of merciful power and allows it to issue forth and help those who believe.

The immediate cure was effected. The proof was clear when they returned to the house and found the servant whole. The outcome of the man's faith had been the curing of his servant. The commendation of his faith by Christ was one reward; the curing of his servant was another.

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

THE START OF FAITH

"Faith comes by hearing." This is an authoritative declaration as to the beginnings of faith. It was what the centurion heard about the power of Jesus to heal that threw down the bars of prejudice and encouraged him to venture to Jesus with an earnest plea. Other things doubtless entered into the early development of his faith, but primarily he heard about Jesus and His work and then he began to believe.

How does faith in God start in the child? Is it not in what he is told about his heavenly Father? Where did our faith in the Redeemer begin? It was in what we heard about Him. How do we get our faith in His atonement? Is it not a growth which had its inception in something we heard about the life and work of Jesus? So we put stress on teaching and preaching. We plan to carry the Gospel to the ends of the earth, so that all men may hear and begin to have faith in Him who is the center of the Gospel. We are sure that like the centurion all men must get their start in believing by hearing about Jesus.

THE STRUGGLES OF FAITH

It is only by inference that we can depict the struggles through which the centurion's faith in Jesus passed. He had no early training to help him look to Jesus hopefully. He had no racial drawing toward Him. He had a Gentile's sense of repulsion for what is Jewish. He had a material attitude toward every phase of life, including relation to God and the blessings of God. How he must have struggled to override all these and go as a humble suppliant to Jesus!

Men are in hard struggles to have faith in the Bible today. It is easy to think of it as an ordinary book, very old and honored, but likely to be out-of-date. Its mysteries are not understandable. It asks to have these taken on faith. Learned men are saying that it is unreasonable and ought not to be taken too seriously. Others are struggling to believe in God. They are trying to measure Him, but they have no yardstick but human judgment, and God is too great to be thus measured, so how can they have faith in Him? Some are struggling to find a faith in Jesus that satisfies. He is different, unique, baffling. Faith waits for factual proof and must struggle on.

THE VENTURE OF FAITH

All faith is a venture. For the centurion it was a perplexing one. Would it pay to try Jesus when medical lore said there was no cure possible for his servant? Personal experience was against submitting his trouble to Jesus. It all seemed so futile, so hopeless. Had it not been that faith was gradually acquiring confidence the venture would not have been made. It was a case of desperation. It seemed to be a last chance. At the worst it did not seem to open the way for any harm to come to the servant. So he made the venture.

We listen to an investment proposal. We do not know the technique of investments. We hesitate to buy. But we are urged and assured. The desire to gain impels us. We venture with hopeful faith. We have gazed at airplanes, but we have never ridden in one. We are told the percentage of accidents is low, and that improved mechanism and increased skill guarantee safety. We have the desire to fly. We are not certain about the safety, but we have faith to venture. Something like these is the venture of faith in God, in the Saviour, in living the Christian life.

THE CONFIDENCE OF FAITH

The conclusion the centurion reached about Jesus was remarkable. However we attempt to account for it, we reach the fact ultimately that he had some confidence in the authority of Jesus over diseases. He regarded Jesus as commander of diseases; this was the parallel he saw between Jesus and his own military office. This gave him confidence in what Jesus could do. To us it seems a poor quality of faith, but Jesus interpreted it as real faith. The centurion's orders were obeyed; he enforced his commands. He had confidence that Jesus could do the same with the disease that held his servant. He laid the trouble before Jesus and indicated his confidence in Him. He demanded no proof; he merely asked and trustingly waited.

A Christian farmer had the best team of horses in the country. He fell under the delusion of a false religion. He was asked by a neighbor if he really believed what he was advocating. His reply was, "Yes, I believe it, but I would give this team of horses if I knew it were true." His was a faith without any semblance of confidence.

THE COMMENDATION OF FAITH

Because of what Jesus said we know the centurion's faith was sincere, deep, true. In fact to Jesus it was an exceptional faith; He was amazed at it, because such a faith was not expected in a Gentile. Whether, or not, the centurion knew how his faith was commended by Jesus, the fact is that it was. Somehow Jesus could not refrain from the commendation; evidently He knew it was deserved.

We talk about people of faith. We see the marks of their faith in their daily living and commend them for it. A man gives up a lucrative business and throws his life into unselfish service in the cause of Christ. He depends on Providence for his future support. The public probably calls him a fool, but wiser men speak of his faith. A missionary ventured into a wild, unknown land exposing himself to dangers, uncertain as to the results of his work. Years passed and he returned safely, and had to his credit the winning of savages to faith in Christ and the starting of Christian influences among them. The Church lauded him for his successes, and he was called an adventurer. But what he most merited was to have his faith commended. After all it is Christ's commendation of faith that Christians should seek to merit.

THE COMPENSATION OF FAITH

The centurion's reward was the restoration of his servant. That was what he went to Jesus for. He received what he wanted. He found what he sought. No doubt he received much more, for the rewards of faith are surprising, going far beyond what men expect to receive.

Allow the records of faith, set down in the Bible, to pass before the mind's eye and one must be impressed with what faith always received. Think of Noah with his faith to build an ark on dry land. Think of Abraham with his faith to go to a country God would show him. Think of Nehemiah with his faith to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Think of Paul with his faith to preach the Gospel everywhere. Think of Jesus with His faith to entrust His Church to the men He had taught. What was their compensation? Did their faith bring them rewards?

We have reached the conviction that faith in Christ is not confined to any race. The color line is not drawn on faith in Christ. Noble Christians are found wherever the Gospel has been proclaimed. They are in Africa as well as America, in China as well as in Canada, in India and Japan and in the remote parts of the earth as well as in our home land. Wherever faith exists it has Christ's commendation and His reward.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

Read the story of the rich young ruler. What commendable traits did he have? What did he seek? What mistakes did he make? Was Jesus too hard on him? Why did he refuse to follow Christ? Is it wrong to be rich? Are there dangers in being rich? Can these dangers be overcome?

THE RICH YOUNG RULER: REFUSING A LIFE OF SACRIFICIAL SERVICE

Lesson VIII
November 23

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LESSON TEXT: Mark 10:17-27.

(American Standard Revision Text)

17. And as he was going forth into the way, there ran one to him, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?

18. And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? none is good save one, *even* God.

19. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not kill, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor thy father and mother.

20. And he said unto him, Teacher, all these things have I observed from my youth.

21. And Jesus looking upon him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me.

22. But his countenance fell at the saying, and he went away sorrowful: for he was one that had great possessions.

23. And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!

24. And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!

25. It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

26. And they were astonished exceedingly, saying unto him, Then who can be saved?

27. Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for all things are possible with God.

GOLDEN TEXT: And he said unto all, If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.—Luke 9:23.

LESSON GOAL.—To teach that whoever chooses to follow Christ must be willing to accept the demands He makes on him.

LESSON PLAN

I. AN UNWILLINGNESS TO MEET CHRIST'S DEMANDS. (17-22.)

1. A Hopeful Questioner.
2. A Hard Demand.
3. A Losing Choice.

II. AN UNSETTLING THOUGHT REMOVED. (23-27.)

1. A Real Difficulty.
2. A Natural Question.
3. A Quieting Answer.

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

Verse 25: *To go through a needle's eye.*—This figure was quite common. In the Babylonian Talmud it has to do with an elephant passing through the eye of a needle. Elephants not being familiar animals to the Jews, the proverb was spoken substituting camel for elephant. The Koran says: "The impious shall find the gates of heaven shut; nor shall he enter there till a camel shall pass through the eye of a needle." "The allusion is not to be explained by reference to a narrow gate called a needle's eye." (*Vincent*). In Luke's account of the rich young ruler he uses "the peculiar word for the surgical needle."

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

It was near the close of the later Perea ministry of Jesus, and He was going on toward Jericho, whence He made His last journey up to Jerusalem, making a brief stay at Bethany and then His triumphal entry into the holy city as the Messiah.

As He was going forth into the way to leave Peræa, a rich young man, a ruler of a local synagogue probably, ran to Him and asked the question that deeply concerned him. This is just an incident by the way, but it fits into the unwinding record of Jesus' ministry.

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

Dissatisfied with his riches and with his position as ruler in the synagogue the young man hurried into Jesus' presence to consult Him in the matter of inheriting eternal life. He knew certainly what he wanted above all else. He possessed all that the Jewish teaching indicated as necessary to have eternal life. Yet he was in a deep distress of soul. His mind was troubled lest he had missed something. In full sincerity of purpose he offered to undertake other deeds so as to be doubly sure of eternal life.

The synoptists with practical agreement relate the story. Certain details and facts are introduced by one or another, so that the thrice-told account should be studied to arrive at all that is involved. The outcome of the story is that when the young man was offered a chance to follow Christ he refused to accept the demands Christ made on him. He stumbled over the requirements. He gave up what he most desired, because he found he could not give up what he already had. Jesus used him as a basis for teaching fundamental truths about entering the kingdom of heaven.

AN UNWILLINGNESS TO MEET CHRIST'S DEMANDS (Vs. 17-22)

They were continuing their journey to Jerusalem, when into the presence of Jesus ran a rich young ruler and kneeling before Him as a *hopeful questioner*, addressed Him as Good Master. "It was an unwonted style of address. 'Master' or 'Teacher' is the Hebrew *Rabbi*; and this title was accounted by the Jews so honorable that it always stood alone, needing no additions. But such was the young ruler's reverence for our Lord that, as though deeming the most honorable of appellations insufficient, he made it more honorable still and styled Him 'Good Master'." (*David Smith*).

Jesus analyzed the mind and heart of the questioner. He knew that the young ruler, trained in the scribal tenets which emphasized meticulous obedience to every law, did not have a true insight into who Jesus was or what His teachings signified. He turned to the ruler and asked what was in his mind, what purpose impelled him to address Jesus as "good." It was not customary for Jews to think of Jesus as the incarnate Son of God. Only God is good, said Jesus. If the ruler thought of Him in terms of deity then his use of the word "good" was proper. If Jesus was just another *Rabbi*, and nothing more, then He ought not be addressed as Good Master. Probably the young man did not grasp

what Jesus meant; there is hardly any reason for supposing that he could.

Jesus began with His questioner just as he was, a fine, upright, law-keeping, exemplary rich man, who had been honored by being selected as ruler of the local synagogue. No impossible task was set before him to shock him, challenge him or discourage him. Within the reach of his own notion of right relation to God, Jesus reviewed the commandments which had been held before him from his childhood. With honest self-measurement the young man replied that from his youth until then he had observed these commandments. His sincerity and earnestness appealed to Jesus. He loved him. "The man was, so far as he had gone, a proper subject of His approval. Certainly no one could hope for eternal life who ignored such principles as are expressed in these commandments."

But there was a strange sense of need in the young man's soul that keeping these commandments did not supply. What he really needed was the message of the cross which Jesus was teaching His disciples. What his next step was to be was to get rid of his false conception of merit before God because of his good life and to reach a conviction that neither his possession nor his deeds could make a place for him before God. Jesus laid a *hard demand* before him, though there was but one thing he lacked. He was told to dispose of his riches, distribute his wealth among the poor and become a follower of Jesus. But this contrast for his life was too much for him. He had enjoyed the fruits of his riches. He had stood in high places and received many honors. To give all this up and become a poor man, wandering over the country as Jesus and His disciples were doing was more than he could undertake. Jesus did not argue or urge; He allowed the choice to be made by the young man as he might decide. With downcast face he turned and walked away in silent sadness. He made a *losing choice*. He was not willing to pay the price. He could not make the sacrifice Jesus asked of him.

AN UNSETTLING THOUGHT REMOVED (Vs. 23-27)

The departure of the sad young man must have left Jesus sad, for He had tried to win him as a follower. He asked of him no more than He had asked of His disciples. But there was a *real difficulty* which would naturally arise in the minds of the disciples and Jesus began to remove it by talking about riches being a cause of stumbling, not because harm inheres in wealth, but because men get into a way of trusting to their riches for everything, including their standing before God. He repeated the statement that it is hard for a rich man, one who trusts in his riches, to get into the kingdom of God.

The disciples were keen enough to see that a man might trust in small riches as well as large, and that probably all men rate their dependence on what they possess too highly. They asked a *natural question*, "Then who can be saved?" The Jews, under scribal teaching, would have particular trouble in being saved if they were rich, since they

would have more time at their command to delve into the minute details of the law and obey them. Jesus had indicated how the rich young ruler could be saved. He had first to become poor, but this did not say that his wealth in itself shut him out of the kingdom. It required that he should put the quest of the kingdom first. By no human judgment alone could this be comprehended. So far as men could reckon it would be impossible, but God had a way of leading "a rich man into a better way of thinking where he will repudiate the primacy of his wealth, and will receive the kingdom of God, on its own conditions, even as a little child." (Mark 10:15.)

This assurance was a *quieting answer* for the disciples. Jesus had made it very plain that a man who puts his riches, or his good works, forward as a bid for merit with God and for entrance into the kingdom is as thoroughly barred out as can be imagined. His going into the kingdom would be as impossible as for a camel to push through the eye of a common needle, or surgical (Luke) needle. But the greater truth, the one that concerns all men, is that God's plan for saving them, while outside the reach of human understanding, is yet available for them. But a step more must be taken, as suggested by the story of the failure of the ruler to accede to what Jesus proposed, and that is that salvation, inheriting eternal life, is a gift of God placed in emptied hands. His offer waits for us to stop trying to merit by works or purchase with money the gift of His love. It must be "nothing in my hands I bring; simply to Thy cross I cling."

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

CONCERN FOR THE FUTURE

The certainty of life after death has taken hold on humanity. Religion of every kind provides for that life in some manner. To the Christian this provision often appears grotesque, ridiculous, silly, as it is manifested in the teachings and practices of non-Christians. There is for all men the desire to have a happy state when death has come and they are transferred into the unknown world. The young ruler thought as he had been taught in terms of eternal life. By that he did not mean immortality but unbreakable happiness. It was his concern for that happy condition in the future that brought him in earnest quest to Jesus.

There has always been held before the Christian the possession of a happy future state, a place in heaven. He has been appealed to on this basis to get him to repent and follow Jesus, as the Way into God's presence. The highest figures of speech have been employed to make that heaven attractive, a lure to sinners and a reward for saints. Sometimes this has been emphasized to the exclusion of the "weightier matters of the law." However, even Paul occasionally thought about the "crown of righteousness."

SOME WRONG CONCLUSIONS

The young ruler was right in thinking that he needed something more than he had already done to inherit eternal life, but he was wrong

in concluding that eternal life is to be received as a return for things done. According to his Jewish teachings he was right in his conclusion, but Christ had a new doctrine about eternal life. He was following the tendency of men left to their natural drift, for experience in worldly matters is that we must work for what we get. Our earthly rewards are in return for service rendered. We are on a pay as you get basis. Only when men have been led into the finer conception of God's rewards and how they are bestowed, do they get rid of these wrong conclusions. The work-righteousness notion takes firm hold on men; one of the hard things the Church has to do is to lead men to see that standing before God is not dependent solely on their good works. To learn that salvation is a gift of God in return for implicit faith in Jesus Christ is not easy, for men are so bound by earthly customs.

SEEKING CHRIST'S DIRECTIONS

The young ruler was wiser than he knew when he consulted Christ. Whatever may have been his estimate of the worthiness of Jesus, he exposed himself to the teachings of the Master and heard the full truth about the question that troubled him. So far so good; he went to the best source for the supply of knowledge about eternal life. In this respect he was exemplary for his day, likewise for ours. If seekers for directions would go to Christ, rather than to many of the places they go, there would be less uncertainty of belief and fewer disappointments in the quest for eternal life.

People are as eager today as ever to be sure of eternal life. They want to be told how to secure entrance to the kingdom of God. There is deep sincerity in many a heart that lacks guidance of the right sort. What everybody needs is contact with the Gospel so as to discover what Christ has to tell about the way to possess eternal life. The trouble is that many are deceived by false teachers, who have never found Christ themselves and are not willing to take account of the humble way of faith as a means to securing God's gracious gift of love, eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

THE COURSE JESUS PRESCRIBES

Criticism has been hurled at Jesus for His narrowness in laying out the course for the young ruler to follow. People, with distorted notions about what Jesus meant, find fault with Him. They pity the young ruler, because they belong to his class. They, like him, are unwilling to take the humble place of a follower of Jesus. They want to cling to the things of the world and center their affections chiefly on what they possess, rather than on what Christ has to give. What Jesus asked was that riches be disposed of and that He be honored as Master. It was the latter requirement that was most exacting. Willingness to do the latter would have made the former easy. The ruler had been a stickler in observing the law; externally he was all right. What Jesus asked was

a heart-searching and an exaltation of something different from great possessions as the things most loved. Jesus did not despise riches or debar the man because he was wealthy; He would never do that. To be a Christian does not call for poverty as a preliminary step. No man's money can of itself keep a man out of the kingdom. What Jesus prescribes is trust in God rather than in riches. The old proverb about the love of money being the root of all evil does not say it is a sin to be rich.

THE WRONG CHOICE

The question was asked and Jesus had answered it. The matter of choosing was with the rich young ruler. He was allowed to do as he pleased in the matter. He could follow Jesus' advice, or refuse it. No persuasion was used on him. Being well qualified to deliberate and decide, he was allowed to do so. He balanced the matter, putting on one side what Jesus asked him to do and on the other what he had been doing, and chose to continue in the way he was going. He would hold on to his possessions. He would not cast in his lot with the wandering disciples and their Master. He made a wrong choice. He was sad in doing it, but not sad enough to reverse his decision and obey Jesus. He went away in silence to continue in the way of living that had not brought him peace and assurance.

We say he was foolish, that he ought to have taken Jesus' directions. But we are as apt as he to make wrong choices. We cling to our own notions about what makes us right with God. We exalt our own worthiness, talk about our goodness, expect God to be pleased with our uprightness. We are unwilling to be disturbed in our contented ways, no matter what the Gospel says. We choose our way, rather than Christ's, too often. We resent being told that we are wrong.

THE LOSS IN SELFISHNESS

Picture the young ruler leaving Jesus; he is as rich as before. He can buy as much as ever; the admiring people will praise his displays. Why not forget what Jesus said and take up his selfish course as before, as though he had never consulted Jesus? Perhaps he tried to do just that. Perhaps he consoled himself in his old notions about eternal life and in his high regard for riches. Maybe he increased his pride in his selfishness. Why should he give everything to the poor and become a pauper himself? Better be selfish and be independent than an unselfish wanderer like Jesus. But his loss, what of that? He lost Christ's approval, even though Christ loved him. He lost his chance to possess eternal life, for he refused to accept Jesus' directions. He lost himself to gain the world.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

Where was Jesus going? What events of the journey are recorded? Who was Zacchaeus? Why did he want to see Jesus? Was it a sincere desire? What hindered him? How did he receive Jesus? What vows did he make? Could Zacchaeus be a good Christian?

ZACCHAEUS THE PUBLICAN: A BUSINESS MAN CONVERTED

Lesson IX
November 30

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

LESSON TEXT: Luke 19: 1-10.

(American Standard Revision Text)

1. And he entered and was passing through Jericho.

2. And behold, a man called by name Zacchæus; and he was a chief publican, and he was rich.

3. And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the crowd, because he was little of stature.

4. And he ran on before, and climbed up into a sycomore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way.

5. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and said unto him, Zacchæus, make haste, and come down; for today I must abide at thy house.

6. And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully.

7. And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, He is gone in to lodge with a man that is a sinner.

8. And Zacchæus stood, and said unto the Lord, Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have wrongfully exacted aught of any man, I restore fourfold.

9. And Jesus said unto him, Today is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham.

10. For the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost.

GOLDEN TEXT: The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost.
—Luke 19: 10.

LESSON GOAL: To teach that when a man with sincere faith accepts Jesus Christ his life principles will be changed and his business policies purified.

LESSON PLAN

I. SEEKING AND FINDING CHRIST. (1-7.)

1. The Desire.
2. The Difficulties.
3. The Outcome.

II. WELCOMING AND SERVING CHRIST. (8-10.)

1. The Reception.
2. The Confession.
3. The Consecration.
4. The Reward.

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

Verse 2: *A Chief publican.*—The publicans were collectors of the Roman imposts. They paid for the privilege and were allowed free hand in levying taxes and customs. Zacchæus was the head of this department of government in Jericho. He had become rich, the inference being that his wealth had come to him through his office.

Verse 4. *Into a sycomore tree.*—This was not like our sycamore trees. It was a fig-mulberry; its fruit was fig-like, but the leaves were similar to those of the mulberry. Its fruit was insipid and only the poor people ate it. Its peculiar way of growing with large branches low down and wide open made it an easy matter for Zacchæus to climb into it and out over the street where he could see who was passing. The sycamine (Luke 17:6) was a different kind of tree.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem. He took the natural course, crossing the Jordan at some ford and going on to Jericho, five miles west of the river and

about six miles north of the Dead Sea. At that time it was still a flourishing and important city on a great thoroughfare. It is likely that He rested there before starting the hard climb up to Jerusalem, about seventeen miles away. The report that Jesus with His band of followers was passing through the city evidently was widely scattered. A crowd gathered to see Him. One of this eager crowd was Zacchæus. He represented a justly hated type of men, despised for their unjust dealings, but he has an honorable place in the account of the saving power of Jesus.

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

The name Zacchæus occurs but three times in the brief story which tells all we know about him. The occasion of his seeing Jesus and the immediate result are recorded. What he did later is a matter of inference. It seems to be assumed that he made good on his promise to change his ways and that his later years made him as notable as a philanthropist as he formerly had been as a tax gouger. Luke is his sole biographer. He is mentioned as doing a strange thing. He made a sudden resolution to be a "good publican." Probably he was not hated as was Matthew; this is merely an inference. Probably he was looked up to as a high official; it was the men under him who came into contact with the people and took their tax money and were despised. He was different from Matthew in that he went to Jesus, whereas Matthew was found by Jesus. Whether it was curiosity or eager desire that took him to see Jesus does not effect the outcome for him. He deserves this commendation that neither the solicitations of friends nor the burden of suffering incited his interest in Jesus, nevertheless by his own initiative he surmounted difficulties and went to Jesus.

SEEKING AND FINDING CHRIST (Vs. 1-7)

Reports about Jesus must have interested Zacchæus. He was a notable character throughout the land. His gracious dealing with men of Zacchæus' occupation had dubbed Him "the friend of publicans and sinners." He went into their houses and ate with them. A fellow-publican, Levi of Capernaum, was accepted as one of His disciples and was called Matthew. Zacchæus, in spite of his office and wealth, was socially shunned, an outcast. He wondered what this Jesus was like; he wanted to see a distinguished Jew who was friendly to publicans.

So *the desire* to see Jesus seized Him. The opportunity to do so had come. The arrival of Jesus in Jericho and His cure of the blind men soon was common talk. The news reached the custom house of Zacchæus, even to the street He was taking as He passed through the city. Leaving his business, perhaps with subordinates in charge, Zacchæus went out into the crowded street determined to discover which one in the crowd was Jesus. He was curious to be sure; who was not in that day for all wanted to get a glimpse of this wonder-working Jesus, who was heralded as the Messiah. He was more than curious; he was seeking just a sight of Jesus, who was reputed to be tolerant of publicans.

But *the difficulties* were great. He was a little man, unable to see over the heads of the people. He was submerged in the crowd and no

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appeal of his would allow him to slip to the front ranks where he could see. Crowds are not considerate; each is bent on getting the choicest place for himself. He thought of a great sycomore tree that Jesus would pass. As a boy he may have climbed it for a clearer view when some procession was passing. It was an undignified thing for a rich official to do, but Zacchaeus climbed into the tree and waited. He must have been noticed by the crowd. Probably they were pointing at him and jeering as Jesus came near. At any rate Jesus looked up and saw him. Zacchaeus had a splendid chance to see the face of Jesus for Jesus was looking at him. Their eyes met.

The outcome was that he had found Jesus and Jesus found him. Both were pleased at finding each other. Jesus was the one to speak; He knew his name and addressed him kindly. Jesus did an unheard of thing when He invited Himself to be a guest in the chief publican's house. He intended to spend the day with him. Heretofore Jesus had entered houses on invitation. Zacchaeus left his place in the tree and to the chagrin and annoyance of the people came down to take Jesus to his house. No wonder he was joyful. The slurring remarks of the crowd did not disturb him. He had Jesus on his side. Besides the murmuring was against Jesus rather than himself. It was Jesus who was regarded as doing the shameful thing, in becoming the guest of a publican. However, no other Jew of Jericho had been thoughtful enough to offer Jesus his house. Best of all for Zacchaeus he had started out seeking Jesus, just to look at Him and see what sort of man He was, but was going to his house with Jesus for his guest.

WELCOMING AND SERVING CHRIST (Vs. 8-10)

The reception of Jesus by Zacchaeus was a surprise to the people no doubt. It was whole-hearted and sincere and full of rejoicing. It seems quite likely that "the wealthier citizens of Jericho had their residences outside on the beautiful plain." Space was limited in the walled city. It is not stated whether the conversation between Zacchaeus and Jesus took place under the tree, in the house, or as they approached the house. It is evident that it was within the hearing of the people.

Zacchaeus made *the confession* which was in reality a pledge for his future conduct. He announced his purpose to give "half of his honest wealth to charity—a generosity far exceeding the ostentation of the Pharisees, who prided themselves on doubling the tithe and bestowing a fifth for alms." He does not acknowledge any wrong doings as a tax collector. He does not incriminate himself as an extortioner. He accuses himself of no injustice. But people will talk and they would class him as equally blameworthy with the worst of the publicans. He throws down a challenge to any man to present his case if he has been defrauded and Zacchaeus will pay him back fourfold. We may think that this is letting Zacchaeus off too easily by saying that he does not know he has wronged anyone. Maybe this was his way of saying in a mild way that whatever he has taken he is ready to restore fourfold. To allow the

latter does make his conversion a more drastic matter. If we consider his words a confession of known guilt, let us not overlook *the consecration* of his possession as a proof, the most natural proof for a man of his standards of life to think of offering.

And what came of it? What was *the reward* to Zacchaeus? Jesus announced to him in the presence of the people and for their instruction, that salvation had come that very day to the house of Zacchaeus. "The family was included in the blessing of the head of the house." As a justification for His statement Jesus reminded the people that Zacchaeus as a son of Abraham was rightfully in line to receive what Jesus had to give to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Jesus was meeting the accusation that He was doing wrong in being friendly to publicans. But "even a publican is a Jew; then he must not be excluded from the Jew's privileges." The mission of Jesus was the saving of the lost, whether Jews or Gentiles. He made no discrimination.

The salvation of Zacchaeus was a demonstration to the disciples that a rich man can enter into the kingdom of God. It is an illustration for us that when with true faith a man seeks and finds Christ he gets a series of new principles for life and puts faultless policies into his dealings with men.

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

DISSATISFIED WITH LIFE

Are the majority of the people we meet glad or gloomy? What can be read on their faces? Is it true that dissatisfaction is the lot of many? They are in poor health; they do not like their work; they are the victims of wrong choices; they have reached the age when industry will not employ them; they are unwelcomed by social groups. Probably most of these situations obtained in the case of Zacchaeus. He had few friends because of the work he was doing. He was getting rich, but wealth did not bring him contentment. He seems to have been a man dissatisfied with life.

The general restlessness of men is evident. "If I had done this," "If only I had not done that," what a difference men think would have come in their lives. But they are tied down to fixed conditions. What can they do? Where can they go where conditions will be improved? Many of them have settled down into a state of resignation to their fate and drag along, complaining a good deal, blaming everything from government to neighbors for their fate. Without doubt, in spite of the desire of everybody to be happy, many are dissatisfied with what they are, with what they do, with what they receive, with what they can hope to attain.

THE QUEST FOR COMFORT

Zacchaeus was a pitiable man except for the fact that he was eager to improve his standing. He longed for friendly companionship. Money would not buy this. It was reported that Jesus, a friend of publicans, was to be in Jericho. He would like to see the face of any man who had a good word for a publican. There would be some comfort

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in having the memory of such a face. He went in quest of just that comfort. He would brave the slurs and abuses of the people and go out on the streets determined to get a glimpse of Jesus. That would mean something to him. It was not bodily but mental and spiritual comfort he longed for; his money could purchase comfort for every physical condition.

Make this a personal matter. What comfort do you need? Maybe it is physical, because of broken health or because of deprivations. Maybe it is mental; memory may drag before you past sins, or doubts may crop out in your thinking about the loyalty of friends, the safety of investments, the questionable success of children, the wisdom of depending on God. Maybe it is heart comfort you seek, that quiet of soul that comes with being right with God. No matter what kind of comfort you want, it seems clear that it is wise to carry the matter to Christ, to get a sight of His face, to hear the tone of His voice, to have Him as a house guest.

BETWEEN US AND CHRIST

Many are in the same relation to Jesus as was Zacchaeus. There was much separating him from Jesus. Between him and Jesus were barriers. Men are conscious of the same hindrances today and try to get around them. One of these is ignorance of Jesus; they do not know Him; they have only reports about Him, often from persons not favorable to Him. Another hindrance is the work in which they engage; it is unpopular and they are not liked and their desire to rise to companionship with Christ and Christians is curbed. Another is their self-measurement; they belittle themselves and will not push through the heedless crowd to take a stand for Christ. Still another is the wonder whether Christ cares anything about them.

Many a man knows that he would like to be a follower of Christ; he may say to himself that he will be after awhile. But for the present he finds too many hindrances between him and Christ. He feels that he cannot get through to Christ. He has the desire but not the determination to put himself into position to see Christ and be welcomed by him. Our sympathy goes out to such men; many of them are good men, honorable in their dealings, moral above reproach. It is a shame that somebody does not help them through their real hindrances.

BARRIERS REMOVED

To Zacchaeus be the credit for making his own way to Christ. He had but little to encourage him and much to discourage him. The people were against him, and his own life was against him. Why should such a man as he want to know Christ? All his barriers he removed. He took matters in his own hands. He started to see Jesus. He was short of stature, but he could climb a tree. He could not be one of the crowd, but he could be an onlooker from a distance. He did not know who Jesus was but he would be able to discover Him by the actions

and words of the crowd. They might laugh at him, or stone him, or denounce him before Jesus; nevertheless he would do his best to see Jesus.

WHEN CHRIST COMES IN

The unexpected recognition of Zacchaeus by Jesus and the volunteering of Jesus to be his guest, opened the way for the entrance of Jesus into the life of the chief publican. He stood forth publicly and pledged his goods for worthy causes. His heart was changed, his faith was settled on Christ, his life took on new principles, his business was to be under pure policies. In truth he was a converted man; his entire person and his possessions were consecrated to a nobler use. How well he carried on thereafter is not told, but Luke would not have recorded this story, it may be assumed, if Zacchaeus had not lived up to his vows.

A prosperous business man in Kansas was caught in a bursting "boom" and found himself poor with pledges unpaid. One was a promise of \$25,000 to a "Y" building. He gave up everything to pay the pledge. He turned to God and vowed a tenth for Him in future years. Prosperity returned. For years he has been using one tenth for himself and giving the rest to God. The tribute of the Kansas governor to this man is: "Many men make money; but few know what to do with it and fewer still know how to put money to work where moth and rust do not corrupt and thieves break through and steal. A. A. Hyde has solved this great problem."

ZEAL FOR RIGHT LIVING

Zacchaeus did not allow his contact with Christ to be a passing delight, a pleasurable experience to talk about. To him it was a call for transformed life and changed policies of living. He determined to remove the hindrances to right living and he made this determination known before Christ and the people. It was a public confession. He had the zeal for Christ, suddenly aroused, and the zeal for doing right which came with it. He treasured both and, we may well believe, conducted his life accordingly.

It is one thing to rejoice in knowing Christ and calling Him Saviour and Friend. It is something else to live for Christ. Not he that says, "Lord, Lord," but he that does His will, proves that Christ has entered his heart and become Lord of his life.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

Read Acts 6:1—7:60. Who was Stephen? How did he rise to prominence in the Church? Why was he an offense to the Jews? What was his fate? Did he make any lasting contribution to Christianity? Why are men of his type needed today?

STEPHEN: AN EARLY INTERPRETER OF CHRISTIANITY

SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

LESSON TEXT: Acts 6:1—7:60. (Print 6:7-10; 7:54-60.)

(American Standard Revision Text)

6:7. And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem exceedingly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

8. And Stephen, full of grace and power, wrought great wonders and signs among the people.

9. But there arose certain of them that were of the synagogue called *the synagogue* of the Libertines, and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and Asia, disputing with Stephen.

10. And they were not able to withstand the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spake.

7:54. Now when they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.

55. But he, being full of the Holy

Spirit, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God,

56. and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.

57. But they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and rushed upon him with one accord;

58. And they cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul.

59. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon *the Lord*, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

60. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

GOLDEN TEXT: They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit.—Acts 6:5.

LESSON GOAL: To give encouragement to the principle of standing up for the truth under all circumstances.

LESSON PLAN

I. STEPHEN SERVING TABLES. (Acts 6:1-6).

1. The Division of Labor.
2. Seven Deacons Chosen.

II. STEPHEN PREACHING CHRIST. (Acts 6:7—7:53.)

1. His Qualification.
2. His Message.
3. His Fearlessness.

III. STEPHEN DYING FOR THE FAITH. (Acts 7:54-60.)

1. His Vision.
2. His Prayer.
3. His Death.

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

Verse 9: *Certain of the synagogue*.—In the temple the high priest was first officer in rank, the chief priest the second and the ruler was third. In the provincial synagogues the ruler was supreme. It was his duty to supervise all matters pertaining to worship.

Chapter 7, verse 58: *And stoned him*.—Among the offenses punishable with death was blasphemy. The ordinary form of capital punishment was stoning. The witnesses led the accused to the place of

stoning and bound his hands and feet. Then a great stone, large enough to crush the breath out of him, was laid over his heart, the witnesses being careful to act together as one man according to the injunction in Deuteronomy 17:7. Then all present could fling stones at the body.

Verse 60: *He fell asleep.*—From earliest times martyrs were held in special honor by the Church. The day on which he died a martyr to his faith was celebrated as his birthday, for they regarded it as the day of his birth to a better life.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

Stephen was one of the early converts to Christianity, for the record of his ministry and death places him within a very few years of Pentecost. He had borne witness to the faith, completed his work, and gone to be with his Saviour before the conversion of Paul, which may have taken place in 36 or 37 A. D.

The growth of the early Church was phenomenal. Pentecost seems to have lasted not only a day but months. The preaching of Peter and John and their associates was made effective by the power of the Holy Spirit. Thousands were added to the Church. Even priests were converted, and not a few of those whose whole interest was in Judaism and who made their living by it saw in Jesus the Messiah of God.

But no effort had so far been made to go beyond Jerusalem. The Church was still limited to the city in which it was born. The preaching was only to the Jews. The birth of the conviction that the Gospel was for all men, regardless of race or tongue, had not yet been experienced. For the time being it was no doubt a wise policy to remain in Jerusalem, for the workers were still few in numbers and they had all they could do in that teeming center. The recurrence of the major and minor feasts brought thousands and millions of Jews from foreign lands to the holy city, and to these the apostles were energetically preaching Jesus and Him crucified.

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

STEPHEN SERVING TABLES

Acts 6:1-6. For several years after the birth of the Church on Pentecost the apostles had made themselves responsible for both the spiritual and temporal affairs of believers. With the increase of the converts the duties of the twelve became correspondingly heavy. More than that complaint had come that discrimination was being shown in the distribution of food and money among the poor, the Jews of foreign lands, who had adopted the language and customs of the Greeks, being slighted.

It seemed wise to the apostles at this juncture to effect a distribution of responsibility, they themselves taking care of the spiritual side of the work, and suggesting the appointment of deacons who would look after the Church's charities. The proposal appealed to the believers and they proceeded to elect deacons. It concerns us chiefly here to note the qualifications of the men who were to fill this position. They were to be "men of good report, full of the Spirit and of wisdom."

STEPHEN PREACHING CHRIST

Acts 6:7-7:53. The rapid growth of the Church was bound to call to its spiritual ministry men who by what they had already done

gave promise of being able to preach the Gospel with peculiar power. Stephen was one of these men, for it is said of him that he was "full of grace and power," and "wrought great wonders and signs among the people." He had gifts that marked him early for service other than that of serving tables.

He at once began preaching in the synagogues, of which there were more than four hundred in the city. The Jews, no matter in what foreign nation they had located, always had a desire to return to Jerusalem; and many of them did come back and settle there. Those who had come from the same country and had acquired similar customs would naturally go to the same synagogue. It seems that Stephen preached in the synagogues attended by these foreign, or Greek-speaking Jews.

Their devotion for the synagogue and the law of Moses would not permit them to hear without protest what Stephen was preaching, for they declared that his words were blasphemous. Their protest soon took the form of argument, in which they were worsted; and then they aroused the audience to that pitch of excited opposition in which they felt it would be safe to take steps against him. They chose men and instructed them to offer false testimony, or at least only half truths, against him. The final step was his arrest and trial before the Sanhedrin.

It is his speech before this august body at which we wish to look. It has been called a personal defense; but it is not so much that as it is a defense of the Gospel he preached. It must be read, and should be read several times, if its meaning is to be grasped.

There are several points in it to be noted.

First, That Stephen accepted the Old Testament. He stood on common ground with his critics. The charge brought against him was that he made light of the Temple and the customs received from Moses. In substance he denied the charge. The greater portion of his address had to do with the ways of God in the old dispensation. He reverently accepted what had been received from Him. He traced with consummate skill and force the movement which brought the Jews into being as a nation, and he saw the hand of God in it all. He was not the blasphemer the prompted witnesses had declared him to be.

Second, That God's plan is a progressive one, the narrow giving way to the broader, and the old being replaced by the new. There was a time when the children of Israel had neither Tabernacle nor Temple, and yet God was with them, and He made it clear when the Temple, which represented the wisdom and wealth of Solomon, was completed that it was not the end of all the good things He had to bestow, for "the Most High dwelleth not in houses made with hands," whether they be on Mount Gerizim or on Mount Zion. So that if what Stephen had said about the Temple and the Mosaic institutions seemed to be a reflection on them it was only with the understanding that God had something better in store for His people.

Third, That the messengers of Jehovah had always been opposed by the Jewish leaders. Moses was repudiated, Samuel was rejected, the prophets were persecuted and put to death. But that was not to be construed to mean that their messages were not from God. If the preachers of the crucified and risen Christ were mocked and arrested that did not mean they were fighting against God; indeed the very opposite, if the history of the Jewish people was to be the test. What Stephen wanted to do was to convince his hearers of their sin in crucifying Jesus and in their rejecting Him as their Saviour.

STEPHEN DYING FOR THE FAITH

Acts 7: 54-60. The words of Stephen cut the members of the Sanhedrin to the heart, but instead of repenting they gnashed on him with their teeth. They would like to have torn him to pieces. He was calm in the midst of the uproar and, turning his face to heaven whence all his help had come, he was comforted with a vision of God, and of Jesus standing on the right hand of the Father. They could not see what he saw, and they were incensed all the more when he told them of the vision. Thinking they were doing God service they rushed upon him with one accord, dragged him out of the city and stoned him to death. The witnesses against the accused were required to cast the first stones. The death penalty had been taken from the Jews by the Romans, but possibly the law was not rigidly enforced, or it may have been a case of mob violence.

We cannot overlook the demeanor of Stephen. He ended his noble life in prayer. He called upon Jesus to receive his spirit. And he did not forget his tormenters. He prayed that their sin might not be laid against them. Thus ended the life of the first Christian martyr, one of the most fearless and saintly worthies of the New Testament.

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

WHAT WE WOULD LIKE TO KNOW

It is not unusual for the Scriptures to give scant space to some of its most prominent and influential characters. This is the case with Stephen. He is not mentioned outside The Acts, and only three times outside the two chapters we have for our study. There is much we would like to know about him. Who were his parents, and, if they were living at this time, did they accompany him into the new faith? Where was he born? The probabilities are that he saw the light of day in some foreign land. In the first place his name indicates it. In the second place when he began preaching he went to the synagogues which were frequented by foreign Jews. We would like to know under what circumstances he was led to accept Jesus as his Saviour. And who preached the sermon on that occasion? Was he among those who sold all they had and gave it to the apostles for charitable purposes?

SOME THINGS WE DO KNOW

He was a Christian. Somewhere between Pentecost and his being chosen to serve tables he saw the enlarging purpose of God and became a follower of "The Way." And it must have been at or near Pentecost, for he had in this short time made such an impression on the young Church that he was deemed worthy to become one of the seven assistants to the apostles. He began, as all of us must begin, to show loyalty to Jesus by rendering such service as is not likely to receive popular attention. But we are forced to believe that he was faithful. He gave a good account of himself. He bore witness to the faith back in the days when he was beginning to train his hands and his mind to do Christian service. We cannot interpret his later life as we know it without believing that his earlier life was of the same stuff.

CALLED TO LARGER DUTIES

First the humble and obscure Christian, then one of a group who were charged with the task of carrying to the poor the money and food the Church provided, and last a preacher of the glorious Gospel of the Son of God; such was the broadening service of this illustrious martyr. How we love to see men and women growing in the kingdom! That does not necessarily mean the holding of many positions. They may not be officers of any organization, but they are growing in power and influence all the time. If any man thinks that his testimony in the kingdom is in proportion to the offices he holds he is mistaken. Too many stop doing anything for the Church when they retire from office. It would be hard to convince us that Stephen was less faithful before he was called to an official position in the Church than he was afterward. Growth ought to be a normal experience with the Christian. To some it will mean the call to official responsibility, but not to all.

WITNESSING THROUGH OUR WORDS

Jesus has the right to expect that we who profess His name shall say a good word for Him as we have opportunity. There is no need for our analyzing here the reasons for our being hesitant in this regard. May it be that we are afraid? May it be that we feel our words will have no weight? Do we suppose our efforts will meet with rebuff? Any one who is familiar with the early Church must know that one of the secrets of its rapid spread lay in the willingness of all who believed in Jesus to tell others the story of the cross. Church historians tell us that down through the early centuries there existed a deep sense of the need for personal evangelism, and that persons in every walk of life shared the good news with their neighbors. We are to witness with our lips.

"Knowing that his end was near, President McKinley called the surgeons about his bedside and said, 'I think we ought to have prayer.'

Crossing his hands upon his breast and half-closing his eyes, while a gentle smile overspread his countenance, the dying man led the doctors, who stood with bowed heads, and the sobbing white-clad nurses, in the Lord's Prayer. He repeated it, with broken tones, to the end, and the surgeons whispered, 'Amen.'"

WITNESSING THROUGH ACTS OF SELF-SACRIFICE

When Jesus stood on Mount Olivet and said to His disciples, "Ye shall be my witnesses," He also said "Ye shall be my martyrs," for the word is translated both witnesses and martyrs. And those men knew what He meant. They had seen Him suffer and die, and they were convinced they would have to drink of the same bitter cup. We say "The blood of the martyrs has become the seed of the Church." The Church could not have survived for a century if its members had not been willing to die for their faith. Times have changed, and while we are not asked to die for our faith, we are asked to live for it, making such sacrifices as will prove our fidelity.

"So he died for his faith. That is fine.
More than the most of us do.
But stay. Can you add to that line
That he lived for it, too?"

WITNESSING THROUGH OUR MANNER OF LIFE

It is said of Stephen that he was a man of "good report;" that is, he was well thought of. He was "full of the Spirit and of wisdom;" that is, the Spirit of truth dwelt within him, and he exercised good judgment and common sense. Further on it is said he was "full of grace and power;" that is, the evidence of God's favor rested upon him; he was gracious in his manner, and withal courageous, vigorous and of great strength. The strongest testimony any Christian can bear is to be found in what he is. If what we say is not beautifully sustained by what we are there is no hope of the message of our lips making any impression. And certainly some goodly measure of what is said of Stephen must be said of us. What we are has such a resonance it may be heard afar. If it is necessary to subtract a poor life witness from a good lip witness there is nothing left.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

Where was Paul born and reared? In what faith was he brought up? Who had been his teacher in Jerusalem? What evidence is there that he was a strict adherent of the Jewish religion? Under what circumstances did his conversion occur? What would you suggest as a few of the factors contributing to that event? How did he regard Judaism from this time on? What evidence did he give of his loyalty to his new faith? Must Paul's experience be set as a standard for all conversions? As you view the life of this man what would you say being a Christian means?

SAUL OF TARSUS: HOW A PHARISEE BECAME A CHRISTIAN

Lesson XI
December 14

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

LESSON TEXT: Acts 22: 3-15.

(American Standard Revision Text)

3. I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, at the feet of Gamaliel, instructed according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God, even as ye all are this day:

4. and I persecuted this Way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women.

5. As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and journeyed to Damascus to bring them also that were there unto Jerusalem in bonds to be punished.

6. And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and drew nigh unto Damascus, about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me.

7. And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

8. And I answered, who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou per-

secutest.

9. And they that were with me beheld indeed the light, but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me.

10. And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do.

11. And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me I came into Damascus.

12. And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well reported of by all the Jews that dwelt there,

13. came unto me, and standing by me said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And in that very hour I looked up on him.

14. And he said, The God of our fathers hath appointed thee to know his will, and to see the Righteous One, and to hear a voice from his mouth.

15. For thou shalt be a witness for him unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard.

GOLDEN TEXT: I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse, that I may gain Christ.—Phil. 3: 8.

LESSON GOAL: To study the means, the nature and the effects of conversion.

LESSON PLAN

I. PAUL THE PERSECUTOR. (Acts 22: 3-5.)

1. His Early Training.
2. His Zeal for the Faith.
3. His Rage Against Christians.

II. PAUL THE CHRISTIAN. (Acts 22: 6-13.)

1. A Light From Heaven.
2. The Voice of Jesus.
3. Help From Ananias.

III. PAUL THE GREAT APOSTLE. (Acts 22: 14, 15.)

1. A New Master.
2. A Powerful Witness.

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

Verse 3: *At the feet of Gamaliel.*—In the Eastern schools the pupils sit on the floor around the teacher, all studying aloud.

Verse 3: *And taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers.*—The young Hebrew's education began early. When he was three years old he learned his birthday text. It was a verse that began with his own initial, and had just as many letters of his name as possible. When he was five he began to learn the Psalms, the hymn-book of his nation; the easy ones beginning with the one hundredth. At six or seven he went to school. There were short hours and only one text-book, the Old Testament. Through his early years he was taught the requirements of his religion and at about twelve or thirteen his school days were ended for he was then considered a man. If he committed any wrong before this age his father suffered the punishment, but from this time on he bore the punishment for his own misdeeds.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

The account of the conversion of Paul appears at three places in The Acts, in chapters 9, 22 and 26. The first is Luke's account, which he no doubt received from the lips of Paul himself, and the last two are by the apostle, the one before his Jewish assailants in Jerusalem, and the other before Festus and Agrippa in Caesarea.

At the time of our lesson Paul had completed his three missionary journeys. He had become the veteran among the apostles, not in years, but in service. He had established churches throughout Asia Minor, Macedonia and Achaia. He had endured persecutions the like of which had not been inflicted on any other ambassador of Christ. He had gathered around him a number of men who had become staunch supporters of his cause. He was bent on making sure that the work he had begun would be carried on after he had finished his course.

It will not be out of place at this point to remind ourselves that Paul had released Christianity from the shackles of Judaism. Though he had been a most rigid legalist before his conversion, he refused to consent to having the religion of Jesus limited to the narrow confines of Jewish thought. In short, he insisted that men be given the privilege of going directly through faith into the kingdom, and not required to go through the labyrinthian and torturous way of Old Testament ceremonialism.

One word further; Paul had hastened to Jerusalem to observe Pentecost in the Temple. It had been arranged that he should try to conciliate the Jews and the Jewish Christians, for they were unfriendly toward him. He failed in the attempt, and he was set upon, dragged from the Temple and nearly killed. But for the swift work of the Romans on guard his career may have closed then and there.

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

PAUL THE PERSECUTOR

Acts 22:3-5. The early training of Paul was similar to that given all Jewish boys. We have reason to believe that his parents were among the strictest of the Jews. They would teach him about God and the priority of their race. They would inculcate into his unfolding mind the simple truths of their religion as he was able to take them in. When he was five or six years of age he was sent to the synagogue school where the Old Testament was the chief and almost only text. He was taught to read and reread it; he was required to memorize large portions of it; and the meaning of the revelation of God to the Jews was explained to him. More than that he was taught a trade, which was that of tent-making.

When he had finished the schools in Tarsus he was sent to Jerusalem where it was believed that the completion of all education in religion could be had. And there Gamaliel, the great teacher of that generation, was to be his guide. Judaism had done its best for Paul. More than that he had a wonderful mind.

Paul may have been slightly younger than Jesus; still it may be said they were contemporaries. There is no evidence their paths ever crossed. Jesus entered upon His ministry, gathered a few disciples around Him and began laying the foundations of His Church. Then came Pentecost, and the establishment of the Church. Its growth was rapid. It looked as though it was destined to sweep everything before it. But it met opposition, organized and stubborn. But no other single persecutor ever played havoc with the Church like Paul. He hated the Christians, and he hated the name of Christ. He would gladly have given his life if he could have extinguished its light. He laid plans for a broad and comprehensive persecution of Christians, having no trouble to gain the assent of those in authority. He had no respect for women believers to say nothing of the men; his methods were torturous and without heart. He had one aim, and he did not care how he attained it. All this sprang out of his zeal for the faith in which he was brought up.

PAUL THE CHRISTIAN

Acts 22:6-13. Paul was on his way to Damascus, a journey of from six to eight days. He was not alone, there being a guard with him. He carried with him letters giving him authority to arrest, persecute and bring to trial those who worshipped Jesus.

Suddenly, within sight of Damascus, he who had set out to arrest others was himself arrested. In the order of events the shining of a blinding light came first. It occurred at noon, and not at night when a meteoric display might have startled the beholders. What he saw outshone the brightness of the sun. From the effects of it he fell to the ground.

But what was of greater significance to him was the voice he heard. At that moment he began to perceive that he had been fighting against God. He showed himself to be in a receptive mood. Those with him heard the sound, but did not comprehend the message. The voice labeled Paul a persecutor, though he was not able as yet to identify the One who was addressing him. But he was not long to be held in suspense. Upon his inquiry the answer came, "I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest." This is the only record in which the words, "of Nazareth" are used. It may be that Paul had employed them in connection with the name of Jesus to add reproach, for he had stopped at nothing to brand the new religion as counterfeit and spurious.

Ever since the days of Paul there have been those who have tried to explain away the semblance of the miraculous in the experience he had. Suffice it to say here the only honest thing for us to do is to accept at

its face value the significance which Paul himself attached to it. Not once during the thirty or more years following his conversion did he doubt that the heart of the vision he beheld was the appearance of Jesus Christ Himself. He argued that if others had seen the Lord, he had seen Him also.

PAUL THE GREAT APOSTLE

Acts 22:14, 15. In a few words Ananias forecast Paul's future. It had been revealed to him that the man before him, at the mention of whose name he had previously trembled, was predestined to know God's will through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, and to enjoy additional revelations of Jesus, the Righteous One, and to hear a voice from His mouth as surely as had those who followed the Lord in the days of His flesh. Paul offered no word of protest, though his future was to be as radically different from his past as the mind could conceive.

Two things were told him as to the witness he was to bear. First, he was to be a witness unto all men, including the Gentiles, though the apostle avoided using that word here lest he offend his hearers; and second, he was to witness to the things he had seen and heard. But that did not mean only what he had seen and heard on the way to Damascus, but also what would later be revealed to him.

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

A PRACTICAL INTERPRETATION

Let us hope that the teacher will not attempt here to distinguish between regeneration, justification, illumination, repentance and conversion. There are differences, but to ask the average teacher to state what they are is like asking him which spoke of a wheel moves first. Let us take into thought the entire process whereby a soul turns or is turned from sin to Jesus Christ. That after all is the question we face today. It may be subdivided into such questions as, Who needs conversion? How is conversion brought about? When do most conversions take place? Is there a divine side to conversion? Is there a human side to conversion? What are the effects of conversion? Conversion means turning about. It is a change of mind and heart. It is ceasing to do evil and learning to do well.

RELIGIOUS TRAINING

We believe in infant baptism and the training of the children in the Christian life. We believe that if this work is done as it should be done in the home, in the Sunday school and the church there will never come a time when the youth will have to experience what is known as conversion. We believe that the normal way of growing Christians is by the method of religious training and instruction through infancy, childhood and youth. But when we have done our best in that direction there will remain youth and adults who will have to be brought to Christ through that experience we call conversion. All of us know hundreds of men and women who are living in the world; their interests, their

thoughts, their habits are those of the world. The things of Christ have no charm for them. They must be won to Him.

FACTS ABOUT SOME CHURCH MEMBERS

"As we have said, and must say often, doctrine alone may be held as a lifeless principle, and may even be made a narcotic to put the soul to sleep. There are people in our churches,—God alone knows how many,—who are self-satisfied because they have been baptized, confirmed and absolved; have communed and belong to and contribute to the congregation, go to church and believe the doctrines. With them all this is heartless formality. . . .

"These church members, who have a name to live while they are dead, who have the form of godliness without its power, who want to rest in their baptism and have nothing of its answer of a good conscience towards God, whose confirmation vows seem to be regarded as empty words, whose absolution is so misinterpreted as if it could mean God's forgiveness for impenitent, cold, prayerless and loveless hearts, whose communing at Christ's altar is without hunger and thirst after righteousness, who are hearers of the Word but not doers, whose doctrine is without godliness, are heretics in life, strangers to Christ, and aliens from the covenant. Oh, they need a reviving, a conversion, a rising from that soul sleep whose end is spiritual death."—*Dr. G. H. Gerberding in Problems and Possibilities.*

THE PERIOD OF MOST CONVERSIONS

"We dare not forget that the close of later adolescence marks 'the danger line in religion.' We remember from the figures quoted in the last chapter that there is a time of special religious interest at twenty, and a relatively large number of conversions. But less than one-sixth of the conversions studied took place after twenty. One-half of these, again, were before twenty-five. The chances are a thousand to one against conversion after thirty. Our duty is obvious. Preachers have appealed for repentance on the ground that we do not know what hour we shall die. Stronger far is the appeal of the facts respecting the age of conversion. Now is the time, not because of what we do not know about death, but because of what we do know about life. Every day's postponement makes it the more certain that our pupil never will consecrate his life to God."—*Dr. Luther A. Weigle in The Pupil and the Teacher.*

THE MANNER OF CONVERSION

In times past much emphasis was laid on the place and time of and the emotions attending conversion. There were those who held that if a person could not tell the time to the hour when he became a Christian his religion was spurious. God has set no standard in the Bible, and we have no business to attempt to make one. What we seek is the fact of conversion. It is our duty to beseech men to become reconciled to God. I may go to church on foot, on horseback, in a buggy, in an

automobile, or in an airplane; it makes little difference. The important thing is that I go to church. Paul never asked his converts to see that their conversion resembled his in manner.

THE MEANS TO BE USED

Conversion is the result of the work of God's grace in the soul. It was this grace which turned Paul from the error of his way. It was a power not of man that halted him in his mad course and gave him a new view of life. One of the offices of the Holy Spirit is to illumine, to bring conviction for sin and to lead to faith. And in this work He uses the Word. Man may resist if he wants to, but if he yields it is through the grace God bestows. The Holy Spirit holds up the Christ of the gospels, of the epistles, of the Church, and of that testimony which you and I may bear; and men in beholding Christ are drawn to Him.

A slave girl was once bought at a high price by a stranger. When he came to claim his purchase, he found her sad and dejected at the thought of leaving her people. He told her he had bought her to set her free and gave her her liberty. She asked him: "Did you pay all that price just to set me free?" He replied: "I did." "Then," said she, "I will go with you and be your servant wherever you go." It was the awful price which Paul saw that Jesus had paid for his freedom that made him forever "the bond servant of Christ."—*Sunday School Magazine*.

THE METHODS EMPLOYED

One method is that of gathering the unchurched into the catechetical class for instruction. Our pastors are making use of this method with most encouraging results. The young people's and adult classes in the Sunday school should be recruiting agencies for the church. They have tremendous evangelistic possibilities within their grasp. The Luther League and the Lutheran Brotherhood should be vital factors here also. The Lenten season in our Church has long since been captured by an evangelistic purpose and outreach. But when all is said and done there is nothing that can surpass the personal effort on the part of Christians to bring souls to Christ, or at least bring them under the direct influence of the preaching and teaching of the Gospel. The committees on evangelism which we have in our denomination testify to our sincere endeavor to reclaim the lost.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

What decree was issued by the Roman emperor? What interest did Rome take in the religion of her subject provinces? Show how that decree fell in with the plan of God.

What were the customs of hospitality in the East? Was the inn keeper to blame for not making provision for Joseph and Mary? Study with care the contents of the message of the angel. Try to reproduce the thoughts of the shepherds as this marvelous revelation was being made to them. What may be said both for and against the spirit in which Christmas is being observed today?

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

LESSON TEXT: Luke 2:1-20. (Print verses 8-20.)

(American Standard Revision Text)

8. And there were shepherds in the same country abiding in the field, and keeping watch by night over their flock.

9. And an angel of the Lord stood by them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

10. And the angel said unto them, Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people:

11. for there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.

12. And this is the sign unto you: Ye shall find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger.

13. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

14. Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace among men
in whom he is well pleased.

15. And it came to pass, when the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing that is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.

16. And they came with haste, and found both Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in the manger.

17. And when they saw it, they made known concerning the saying which was spoken to them about this child.

18. And all that heard it wondered at the things which were spoken unto them by the shepherds.

19. But Mary kept all these sayings, pondering them in her heart.

20. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, even as it was spoken unto them.

GOLDEN TEXT: There is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.—Luke 2: 11.

LESSON GOAL: To lead the pupils into an appreciation of the fact and purpose of Christ's coming into the world.

LESSON PLAN

I. THE EMPEROR'S DECREE. (Luke 2:1-3.)

II. THE ANCESTRAL CITY. (Luke 2:4, 5.)

III. THE BIRTH OF JESUS. (Luke 2:6, 7.)

IV. THE ANGEL'S MESSAGE. (Luke 2:8-12.)

V. THE ANGELS' SONG. (Luke 2:13, 14.)

VI. THE SEEKING SHEPHERDS. (Luke 2:15-18, 20.)

VII. THE CONTEMPLATIVE MARY. (Luke 2:19.)

ORIENTAL SIDE-LIGHTS

Verse 7: *And wrapped him in swaddling clothes.*—According to the custom in Palestine clothes are not put upon an infant, but a swaddle instead. Among some people the custom prevails of rubbing the newborn child's body with powdered salt, water not being used for forty days.

The swaddle is a piece of cloth about a yard square with a narrow band attached to one corner. The infant, with arms by its side and its

legs lying straight, is wrapped tightly in this cloth, the band wound round and round its little body making it look more like a mummy than a living, happy baby.

Verse 8: *Keeping watch over their flocks by night.* By day and by night the shepherd is always with his sheep. This was necessary because of danger from wild animals and robbers. He often has a dog or two with him, not only to give warning by night of the approach of thieves, but fierce enough to give battle to wolves.

Verse 15: *Even unto Bethlehem.*—There is no doubt that the Church of the Nativity marks the spot where Jesus was born. In the floor is a marble slab in the center of which is a large brass star bearing the inscription in Latin: "Here Jesus was born of Mary." The many lamps in the room, each the gift of a king, are never permitted to go out.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

"Bethlehem is six miles from Jerusalem, a little to the east of the road between that city and Hebron. It is one of the oldest towns in Palestine and comes into notice first under the name of Ephra or Ephratha. Apart from personal associations of deepest interest, it never attained very great distinction. It was 'little among the thousands of Judah.' But it had a distinction all its own as the city of Boaz, of Naomi, of Ruth by adoption, and of David. Above all is it memorable as the birthplace of Jesus. Among its features pointed out to the traveler are the Cave of the Nativity, which is the traditional birthplace of Jesus, the well of David, reputed to be the well from which three brave warriors brought water to David to drink. The rugged hills on the east of the town are probably the pasture lands where David guarded his father's flocks and where a thousand years later other 'shepherds were abiding, keeping watch over their flocks by night,'"—*Calkin*.

THE TEXT INTERPRETED

THE EMPEROR'S DECREE

Luke 2: 1-3. Sufficient is told us here to account for Joseph and Mary making the long journey at that particular time from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Caesar Augustus, Emperor of Rome, issued a decree that his provinces should take a census, or enrolment, apparently for the purpose of future taxation. It appears that such a census was taken every fourteen years. Luke speaks of this as the "first enrolment," perhaps meaning thereby the first in a certain series.

Rome was wise and generous enough to grant her subject peoples a large measure of autonomy. She issued the decree for a census, but each province could take the census according to its own custom. For the Jews it meant enrolment in their ancestral cities, or where their family records were kept.

THE ANCESTRAL CITY

2: 4, 5. The sacred records tell us that Joseph was a descendant of King David, and the same was probably true also of Mary. Now Bethlehem was the city of David, hence the city to which they would naturally go to be registered. It is to be supposed that Joseph had some property there, even though he had his residence in Nāzareth. The

distance they would have to travel was about seventy miles. If the Jews had followed the custom of the Romans they would have had every man enrol in the city or the town in which he lived. There are those who think it was legally necessary for Mary to accompany her husband to Bethlehem; at any rate she would want to be with him at this time; and it is probable they had in mind the fulfilment of prophecy.

THE BIRTH OF JESUS

2:6, 7. When the couple reached Bethlehem they applied for accommodations at the inn which Dean Farrar describes as "an enclosed place surrounded by open recesses of which the paved floor (*leewan*) is raised a little above the ground. There is often no host, and the use of any vacant *leewan* is free, but the traveler pays a trifle for food and water, etc. If the khan is crowded the traveler must be content with a corner of the courtyard or enclosed place among the cattle, or else in the stable. The stable is often a limestone cave or grotto, and there is a very ancient tradition that this was the case in the khan of Bethlehem. If, as is most probable, the traditional site of the Nativity is the real one, it took place in one of the caves where St. Jerome spent so many years as a hermit, and translated the Bible into Latin (the Vulgate). The khan perhaps dated back as far as the days of David under the name of the House or Hotel of Chinham (II Sam. 19: 37, 38; Jer. 41: 17)."

Joseph and Mary found shelter in a stable where Jesus was born, the manger becoming His cradle, which was a trough cut in the side of the cave. "The custom of wrapping the newborn infant in bands of cloth has long prevailed, and still exists in the East. This treatment was supposed to make for the strengthening and proper growth of the back and limbs, as well as being convenient for carrying the child."

THE ANGEL'S MESSAGE

2:8-12. The shepherds who were probably watching the flocks that were intended for sacrifice in the Temple were not sensible of the immanence of any visitor from the starry heavens. This night, so far as they knew, was to be like hundreds of other nights they had spent on those same hills. But suddenly an unexpected figure stood by them. It was an angel, and attending him was the glory of the Lord. Unaccustomed to scenes of this character, the shepherds were terrified. The angel, realizing the state of mind in which they were, lost no time in assuring them that there was no reason to be afraid. Instead the occasion was one of great joy. For in the announcement about to be made would be fulfilled all their hopes. It was the love and not the judgment of God which was to set this night apart from all others. The new era being ushered in was not for their condemnation but their salvation. Jesus, the long promised Messiah, for whom they were

looking, was born in their midst. He was to be their Saviour and the word to which they were listening was good news.

THE ANGELS' SONG

2:13, 14. The unique errand of the one angel was confirmed by the sudden appearance of a celestial choir who sang the first Christmas hymn. "The *Gloria in Excelsis* was the first Christmas hymn, used as a morning hymn in the Greek Church as early as the second or third century, a source from which many another spiritual and lovely hymn has been derived." The angels, though they need no redemption, saw the meaning of Christ's coming, and led in that chorus of exultant praise to God which is to cover all the earth. Their message in song was brief, but it contained the heart of the Gospel.

THE SEEKING SHEPHERDS

2:15-18, 20. The shepherds, accepting the challenge of the angel, hastened to the city to see for themselves Mary's child. Fortunately they did not drop the matter when the angels returned to heaven, but sought the confirmation of their hopes which had been kindled by what they had just heard. Neither did they stop there. They related their strange experience to all they met; and perhaps it was their testimony that strengthened the assurance of such persons as Simeon and Anna that they were soon to see the Messiah.

THE CONTEMPLATIVE MARY

2:19. Mary, on the other hand, was reticent and quiet. She did not rush here and there informing others of what had come to pass. Neither was she trying to solve the mystery which not even the angels attempted to unravel. She was thinking over what God had done for her, and concentrating her affection on the child. Her present duty was in the stable, nurturing the life of the child who was to become the Saviour of the world in fact as well as in name.

TRUTHS FOR DAILY LIVING

MUCH IN LITTLE

Are we not amazed at the brevity and the simplicity of the account of our Lord's birth? Take away the preliminary statements which do nothing more than give us the surroundings, and then we shall see to how few verses it is confined. We marvel at the restraint the evangelists exercised in the writing of their gospels. They were content with the simple facts, and left them unadorned with tales for the curious. But what a wealth of devotional literature has grown out of the few verses that tell of the Saviour's birth! Take for instance the *Common Service Book* and read over the Christmas hymns, and see what a fountain of inspiration the manger in Bethlehem has been. More than that, acquaintance with some of those hymns will go far toward fitting the teacher for his task before the class today.

THE FACT OF CHRIST

In the *Lesson Goal* we state that it should be our aim to arrive at an appreciation of the fact and purpose of Christ's coming into the world. It hardly seems necessary to pause to establish the fact. Christ is a fact. His birth is a fact. He was born in Bethlehem. His mother was Mary, and His were the experiences of childhood. If you were to sit down and write a letter the date you put on it would show the world's acceptance of the historical fact of the birth of Jesus; for that date would testify that so many years have passed since He was born. Now it requires more than a trifling event to change the calendar and to turn into new and better channels the currents of human thought. Our religion is rooted and grounded in something that actually happened. "Be careful in studying it and teaching it not to throw such a veil of refined spiritual meanings and imaginative beauties around the story as to obscure the plain beauty of what happened and began to happen when Jesus was born."

THE CHRIST OF EXPERIENCE

But we would not get very far if the only thing we did was to concur in the statement that Jesus was born in a stable in Bethlehem. He was born in Bethlehem that He might be born in our hearts. We often hear ministers speaking of the Christ of experience. And what they mean by it is that we have not gone far enough when we speak of the Christ of history. Christ does relate Himself definitely and vitally to us as individuals. He comes into our hearts; He directs our thinking; He empowers our wills. In short, it is possible for me to say that He is my Christ and my Saviour. And when we speak of appreciating the *fact* of Christ we mean to say we enter into close union with Him, so that by our choice He has the rule of our lives.

THE NEED OF CHRIST

It would take us a long time to sum up all of man's needs. It would take us just as long to sum up all the blessings Christ has brought us by His coming to identify Himself with our lives. It sometimes happens that the persons whose needs are greatest and deepest are the last to become conscious of that need. Those who have appropriated the benefits of the Gospel and have been lifted out of darkness into light know better than any others how great was that darkness. If you were to say to some that they need Jesus they would laugh at you. But that does not change the fact. Our needs are many, and we have a long distance to travel before we arrive at perfection, but the deepest need we have is the need of Christ, and the one power that will most help us toward perfection is Christ.

EXALTING THE COMMONPLACE

We have no difficulty identifying the marks of the supernatural in the birth of our Lord, such as the angelic message, the song of the

heavenly host, the guiding star. But the human touches were not wanting either. Indeed they predominate. Jesus saw the light of day in an unpretentious little town to the south of Jerusalem; He was born in a stable and cradled in a manger; His birth was announced to obscure shepherds, whose names are unknown; He was born of humble parents, indeed they were poor. Nothing that was noticeable about His birth-place connected Him with the patrician or royal classes. And Jesus despised none of these things. He deliberately cast His lot with the common people, and into surroundings that gave no show of wealth. And what an inspiration that fact has been to all people since His day! His humble birth has glorified the commonplace. By His humiliation we have been exalted.

THE SAVIOUR OF THE WORLD

That is what the angel called Him, "a Saviour," and then added "to all the people." It is true that He is a teacher, a friend, a companion, and much besides; but we have not gotten at the root of the matter until we see in Him the Saviour from sin. That was God's thought for He required it to be so written throughout the Old Testament; and Jesus came to reveal God's purpose to us and to accomplish it in His own life. God gave Him to be a Saviour.

The Australian essayist Boreham gives this interesting illustration: "When Sir Harry Lauder was here in Melbourne, he had just sustained the loss of his only son. His boy had fallen at the front. And, with this in mind, Sir Harry told a beautiful and touching story. 'A man came to my dressing-room in a New York theatre,' he said, 'and told of an experience that had recently befallen him. In American towns, any household that had given a son to the war was entitled to place a star on the windowpane. A few nights before he came to see me, this man was walking down a certain avenue in New York accompanied by his wee boy. The lad became very interested in the lighted windows of the houses, and clapped his hands when he saw the star. As they passed house after house, he would say, "O look, Daddy, there's another house that has given a son to the War! There's one with two stars! And look! there's a house with no star at all!" At last they came to a break in the houses. Through the gap could be seen the evening star shining brightly in the sky. The little fellow caught his breath. "O look, Daddy," he cried, "God must have given his Son, for he has got a star in his window."'"—*Dr. Hugh Thomson Kerr in the Westminster Teacher.*

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON

Write on a sheet of paper the names of the characters we have studied this quarter. Before you prepare your review set down alongside each name what you conceive to be the chief trait and the principal achievement of each individual. When you have done that ask yourself if there is any good reason why God chose men and women of different capacities, abilities and aptitudes. If you have time, and you are disposed to believe that there will be value in it, place beside the name of each life we have studied one weakness you have found in it.

REVIEW: THE PATTERN OF CHRISTIAN LIVING

Lesson XIII
December 28

SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

DEVOTIONAL READING: Matthew 5:3-16.

(American Standard Revision Text)

3. Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

5. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

6. Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

7. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

8. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

9. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called sons of God.

10. Blessed are they that have been persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11. Blessed are ye when *men* shall reproach you, and persecute you, and say

all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

12. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets that were before you.

13. Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost its savor, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men.

14. Ye are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid.

15. Neither do *men* light a lamp, and put it under the bushel, but on the stand; and it shineth unto all that are in the house.

16. Even so let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

GOLDEN TEXT: Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.—
Philippians 2:5.

LESSON GOAL: To discover through a study of the experiences, attitudes, and actions of representative men and women of the New Testament the factors which determined their characters, and to create in the pupil an earnest desire and purpose to avoid their mistakes, and to express the Christian spirit and Christian ideals in his personal life and in all his relationships.

REVIEW PLAN

I. REPRESENTATIVE MEN AND WOMEN.

II. THE CHARACTERS STUDIED.

III. LESSONS FROM THEIR LIVES.

INTRODUCTORY

The usual temptation of the teacher is to attempt to encompass too much material in the review. It is a very natural temptation, for there is such a wealth of suggestions to draw from. This situation is certainly true when one comes to review twelve characters, as is the case in this instance. Perhaps the teacher had better decide on a rather limited line of procedure and stay close to it if he hopes to gain the most profit from his work. For some teachers it may prove best to take up the characters one by one, asking a few questions about each, and drawing a few lessons from the facts presented. Others may desire to think of the

quarter's work in the large, making only an occasional reference to the men and women who have been studied. It may be desirable to introduce several characters who have had to be omitted, for the purpose of showing that those who have passed before us were not alone in their struggle to make Christ known. Our only point here is that the teacher will have to determine before he gets before his class the precise method he intends to pursue. The notes offered here can be nothing more than suggestive.

REPRESENTATIVE MEN AND WOMEN

It may be desirable for us to lay some emphasis on the word *representative*. Without question if another committee had been making the selection of characters for study it would have included some that have been excluded and excluded some that have been included.

Think of the long list of talented and faithful ones who had to be omitted. There are John, Matthew, Andrew, Philip, Mary Magdalene, Martha and Mary, Barnabas, Mark, Luke, and a dozen others who would be deserving of our earnest study.

But is it not true that those who have been chosen are representative of those who have been omitted? What any committee, appointed to perform a piece of work of this kind, would aim to do would be to select men and women of different talents, with different experiences, capable of performing varied tasks, and making some distinctive contribution to the cause in which they had enlisted. So that those who did not get into the list are not less worthy necessarily. The traits they possessed and the work they did were duplicated in the lives of the men and the women we have had the privilege of studying. For if you will notice the sub-titles of our lessons you will observe that it is traits, positions in life and characteristics that we have been studying, and certain individuals have been introduced to throw light on these.

THE CHARACTERS STUDIED

Zacharias and Elisabeth.—This godly couple stood back within the shadows. They caught glimpses of the light that was coming, but did not live to see it in its fulness. Zacharias was a godly priest and his wife was in thorough sympathy with him in his work. We are told that "They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." Under the special favor of God they were enabled to give to the world one of the greatest men of all time. The consciousness of that fact was their sufficient joy. The Spirit of the Lord bore witness with their spirit that they had not lived in vain.

Mary.—Mary is brought before us as an example of motherhood. It was her great joy and exalted honor to bring Jesus into the world. It was her joy to have her Son in her home until He was thirty years of age. We are told that during all these years He was subject to her. The relationship between the two must have been a very close one. It cannot be otherwise than that her influence over Him was very marked. We can easily imagine that many, many times they would sit down and

converse together on the things pertaining to the kingdom. He never forgot what He owed her.

Simeon and Anna.—There were those in Israel whose thoughts by day and night were of the coming Messiah. They associated His advent with the Temple in which God was pleased to dwell. They somehow felt that they would not close their eyes in death until they had seen Him in the flesh. They were not to be denied the desire of their hearts. God added year after year to their already advancing age so that their prayers should not be in vain. Something told them when they saw the Babe in the Temple that this was He who would bring salvation to all people.

Simon Peter.—This man was asked to leave his nets in order that under the training of Jesus he might become a fisher of men. Jesus saw in him qualities which when disciplined and developed would fit him to occupy a place of supreme importance in the kingdom. He was a diamond in the rough. It is doubtful if any other leader would have chosen him. There was much to be said against him. His rashness often betrayed him. But under the influence and instruction of our Lord Peter became a pillar in the Church. It was he who made the great confession. It was he who preached the sermon on Pentecost. It was he who went down to Samaria and admitted the converts of that city into the Church. It was he who went to the house of Cornelius and opened the door of the kingdom to Gentiles.

Thomas.—It is quite the custom to berate Thomas, especially because he would not believe on the testimony of others that Jesus had risen from the dead. He has been dubbed the doubter, but let us hasten to add that if he was a doubter he was at least an honest one. He represents a large group of people who require a firm basis of fact for their faith. Thomas never doubted when he had evidence justifying an attitude of faith. He said that before he could believe it would be necessary for him to see with his own eyes the living Christ; and he no sooner laid eyes on Him than he cried, "My Lord and my God."

The Believing Centurion.—This is a nameless hero whose portrait of splendid faith is entered upon the New Testament pages. He was a Gentile who did not have much chance of gaining his wish for his sick servant. But he took what little chance he had, and his was a glorious victory, for he had the power of faith, and that Jesus never denied. May we call him one of the ice-breakers? He was one of the first of the non-Jews to receive recognition from the Messiah, but he would not have been that fortunate if the Jews had had their way. His victory was a foretaste of that age-long struggle of the races of the earth to be fair with one another. In granting this man his petition Jesus gave to His associates a broad hint of His purpose to bring salvation to all men.

The Rich Young Ruler.—This is the only sad story brought before us in our quarter's lessons. He is not named; for this we are glad. But

he was a real person. Who can tell how large the group he represents? He was called upon to make a choice. Choosing one way would have brought sacrifice, hardship, persecution, and maybe martyrdom. Choosing the other way was to bring him ease, plenty, comfort. Which did he choose? Which would we have chosen under similar circumstances? He had much to lose by choosing Jesus,—and much to gain. He visioned the loss, but not the gain. He was not ready to pay the price. That multitudes of men and women will not give up their luxuries, their ease and their sins to become followers of Jesus is an old story. It is still true that all of us face the high way and the low way, and we must choose which we shall take.

Zacchaeus.—This publican is chosen to represent the business man. It is said that business needs to be converted and made Christian. To that we all assent. A lady was telling a few of us the other day of the systematic way the driver of a bread wagon had of cheating his customers on her street. She concluded her story with the statement that no business man can be trusted these days. And she had a collection of evidence it would be hard to shatter. Now the only way to convert business is to convert the men who are carrying on the business. Dry goods, and vegetables and real estate do not lie and cheat. The golden rule will never be put into business until the spirit of Jesus puts it there.

Stephen.—To Stephen it was given to see the narrowness of Judaism and the expansiveness of Christianity. As he read his Old Testament he became convinced that God had something more to say to the world than was comprehended in that precious book, and that that something was embodied in the person of Jesus Christ. It was a long step to take, but he took it without fear of contradiction, and he staked his life on the truthfulness of it. His life was like a shooting star, but it has left a light that shall never fade from the earth. The view he took of Christianity came to be shared by Paul and others who followed him.

Saul.—Saul was a Pharisee. That faith was not something that he held; it was something that held him. He would have given everything he had, and life itself, if he could have made it the dominant faith of all men. But there was something better in store for him, and he was still a young man when he saw what it was. It was more than a trifle or a hint that led him to give up the old for the new, the shadow for the substance, the symbol for the reality. For more reasons than one it was hard for Pharisees to become Christians. For one reason Jesus had thoroughly denounced them. They were such hypocrites and formalists. The spirit of true religion had gone from them and they wist not of it. But many of them did become Christians, and Saul, of whom it was least expected, was one of them. He never regretted the step. It was like living in a new world. He could not understand how it was possible for him to be content with Phariseism. The Jesus who had meant nothing to him now meant everything to him. He became Christianity's foremost interpreter and ambassador.

LESSONS FROM THEIR LIVES

THE INCLUSIVENESS OF THE CALL

As we let our minds run over the men and the women of the quarter we notice that hardly any two of them represent the same walk in life. We have the priest, the mother, the fisherman, the centurion, the ruler, the business man, the server of tables, the Pharisee, and so on. But Jesus had a call and a place for all of them. They did not have the same talents, they could not do the same things; but if they were willing to do what they could and dedicate what they had to Him He was glad to share His work with them. There can be little doubt that He called many who turned a deaf ear, and there can be just as little doubt that many accepted His call of whom we have no mention. We may believe that Jesus calls us as truly as He called those who became His earliest disciples.

THE POWER THAT LIFTS

There have always been persons who had it within them to rise to earthly greatness. Their names would be known near and far without any help the Gospel could bring them. They proved to be masters of circumstances. History is ablaze with these shining lights. They represent all walks of life. We have them among us today. They are known. They will continue to be known.

But that would probably never have happened to any of the men and the women we are studying about, with the possible exception of Paul. They would have lived and died in comparative obscurity. They had average gifts, but nothing beyond that. Now what happened? Simply this: They came into contact with Jesus, and the power of His life lifted them both to an earthly and a heavenly immortality. It cannot be explained any other way.

"We have a wonderful way of associating certain qualities with certain names. The name becomes fragrant, not as the rose is fragrant, but as the clay is fragrant that has long lain with the rose. I see that two European newspapers have recently taken a vote as to the most popular name for a boy and the most popular name for a girl. And in the result the names of John and Mary hopelessly outdistanced all competitors. But why? There is nothing in the name of John or of the name of Mary to account for such general attachment. Some names, like Lily, or Rose, or Violet, suggest beautiful images, and are loved on that account. But the name of John and the name of Mary suggest nothing but the memory of certain wearers. How, then, are we to account for it? The riddle is easily read. Long, long ago, on a green hill far away, there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and the disciple whom Jesus loved. And when Mary left that awful and tragic scene, she left it, as Jesus Himself desired that she should leave it, leaning on the arm of John. And because these two were first in the human love of Jesus, their names have occupied a place of special fondness in the hearts of all men ever since. Like the fly held in the

amber, the memory of great and sterling qualities is encased and perpetuated in the very names we bear."—*F. W. Boreham in Mushrooms on the Moor.*

THEIR DISADVANTAGE

I think we ought to consider that these men and women gave their lives and their service to Jesus when there was a large element of chance in the venture. He was a stranger to them and to the nation. His work was ahead of Him, and not back of Him. They did not understand Him. He had only a few months before emerged from total obscurity. Today we would be disposed to question the wisdom, perhaps the sanity, of the man who would pick up and follow a strange leader. Our situation is far different from what theirs was. We have the cross and Olivet back of us. We have nineteen centuries of Christian history to enlighten and guide us. But those people had nothing of the sort. What they did was to accept the Jesus of experience before they accepted, or had the chance to accept, the Jesus of history. We proceed in the opposite direction, and this difference ought to be placed to their credit.

FAITHFULNESS TO LITTLE LIGHT

What I have said above leads me to remark also that we should bear in mind the first disciples of Jesus, though they sometimes doubted and denied, lived a remarkably surrendered and loyal life. They were blazing new paths for all future generations of Christians to walk in, and that was no light task. They did not have the standards and guides we have. They had not had Christian parentage. They did not grow up in a Christian environment that makes it comparatively easy to become a follower of Jesus. They had to fight their way to Jesus through a background of training that was pharisaical, and through surroundings that were anti-Christian. That was a proposition vastly different from what we face today. The trend was not toward Him except superficially. He had only a few hundred disciples when He went to the cross. It was a time when men went to Him as individuals and not in troops.

GROWING IN GRACE

It is extremely interesting and profitable to take these individuals and compare, as far as the facts are provided, what they were when they first came to Jesus with what they were after being several years in His company, and then after Pentecost. They had what has been called a variety of religious experiences; yet in this particular they resembled one another very much: they passed from weakness to strength, from uncertainty to certainty, from grace to grace. They were not the kind of Christians who stand still. Practicing the presence of Jesus results in larger likeness to Him and that is what must continue to go on in our lives. If we do not grow in grace we lose the grace we have. The comparison of our faith, loyalty, love and good works today with those of five or ten years ago should show considerable progress. The penalty of contentment with present achievement is the withdrawal of the power to believe and do.

